



JEEVADHARA

AGENDA OF THE CHURCH IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Edited by
Kuncheria Pathil

PROCESSED

AUG 22 2014

U LIBRARY

Vol. XLIV 2014

ISSN 0970 - 1125

No. 262

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

FOUNDER EDITOR

Joseph Constantine Manalel

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Kuncheria Pathil

SECTION EDITORS

Societal Concerns

Felix Wilfred

Sunny Maniyakupara

Word of God

Selva Rathinam

George Edayadiyil

The Living Christ

Jacob Parappally

Saji Mathew Kanayankal

Communion of People

Kuncheria Pathil

Tony Neelankavil

Harmony of Religions

Vincent Sekhar

Vincent Kundukulam

Fulness of Life

Mathew Illathuparampil

Mathew Paikada

Secretary

P.U. Abraham

jeevadhara

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

Agenda of the Church in Civil Society

Edited by:
Kuncheria Pathil

Mallooserry P. O.,

Kottayam - 686 041

Kerala, India

Tel: (91) (481) 2392530, 2397017

Mob: 9495519775

E-mail: jcmanalel@gmail.com

Web: www.jeevadhara.org

CONTENTS

Editorial	5
Church in Civil Society: Inspirational and Prophetic	9
<i>Patrick Gnanapragasam</i>	
Situating Church in the Vision of Inclusive Development	21
<i>Antony Kalliath</i>	
Church and Social Movements	32
<i>Poulose Mangai</i>	
Participatory Democracy and Emancipation of Subalterns	43
<i>Maria Arul Raja</i>	
Interreligious Relations in Civil Society	55
<i>Sebastian Painadath</i>	
Greening the Oppressed Land:	
Response of the Church to the Impending Ecological Crisis	68
<i>Oliver Inchody</i>	

Editorial

Jesus preached the 'Kingdom of God' and what came into existence was the Church. In the past the Church had very often identified itself with the 'Kingdom of God', the redeemed humanity, which is the final destiny of the entire humankind. Thus salvation was limited within the boundaries of the Church and the mission of the Church was conceived as purely spiritual and otherworldly by converting all people to the Church and thus saving them from the world. The world, all its cultures and religions, were seen as opposed to the Church.

It may not be too exaggerated to say that the pre-Vatican II Church was in a way introverted and very negative towards the world. Perhaps, the experience of persecutions from the secular powers, sufferings and martyrdoms of the early Church, the influence of Platonic philosophy and Manichaeism with regard to matter as evil had created in the Christian community a negativity to the world. 'Flight from the world' and 'contempt for the world' was the predominant features of traditional Christian spirituality. The Church's opposition and objections to the modern developments and innovative thinking, such as, Darwin's theory of evolution, Marxism, democracy, Modernism etc had created the impression that the Church is against all new thinking, progress and development. The Church was thus seen as a 'conservative force', static, and estranged from the world and its new developments and against all new thinking.

The greatest change made in the Church by the Second Vatican Council was radical openness and commitment to the world mainly by the Council's Pastoral Constitution on Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. The Council strongly affirmed the presence and action of God and of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of the world, which God so much loved and for which He sent his Son. The Church of

Christ is for the sake of the World. The Church is sent to the world for the sake of the salvation of the world. According to the Council, while acknowledging the autonomy of the temporal realities, the Church has to be committed to the transformation of the world and the creation of a new society. Our eternal salvation is very much bound up with our commitment to the renewal and liberation of socio-economic and political realities of the world. The Council therefore saw the Church not in opposition to, but in partnership with the world. Hence Christian involvement and responsibility in the 'Civil Space' is seen in a new light as a real pastoral commitment.

Civil Space is a quasi-independent space distinct from political State and market forces. It is a free space where the public, cultural movements, social movements, religions, non-governmental organizations, social thinkers, critics and activists, and media work together for the welfare and authentic development of human society, animal kingdom and for the integrity of nature and the entire cosmos. One of the primary duties of the Church, as understood by Vatican II, is authentic transformation of humanity and the environment by involvement and commitment in the Civil Space. This Number of *Jeevadhara* is meant to introduce our readers to the pastoral commitment of the Church in the Civil Space in certain vital areas.

Gnana Patrick starts with the notion of "civil society" and its evolution. By the word civil society first meant the secular political society independent of the influence of religions. Later it was used for economic activities which claimed autonomy from the state dominion. Today by civil society we mean an independent free space distinct from the political and economic and market forces, where the common people or all the citizens can play a decisive role by participation and decision making, which would affect their future and that of the society. It may be debated whether religion can be an active player in civil society, and there may be different views on it. It is generally agreed that religion/Church can play an inspirational and prophetic role by strengthening the spiritual and moral values of humanity as expressed in all the religions. Church can mediate life and authentic human values and become a catalyst hinged on the two fundamental principles of divine transcendence and human fraternity and solidarity.

Antony Kalliath highlights the present mood and ethos of inclusivism in the place of the traditional exclusivism of the Church in relation to other churches, religions, cultures and secular realities. He spells out some of the details of economic inclusivism and inclusive development in the place of Neo-Liberal Capitalism and Marxian socialism. He briefly presents and analyses the new economic policies and plans envisaged by India's Five Year Plans. The plans and projects and the vision behind them seem to be excellent, but the benefits do not reach the lower strata of the society who terribly need them. All the plans and projects are by and large manipulated by the bureaucracy and the rich for their own self-aggrandizement. Church should become an agency of advocacy, inspiration and social persuasion for an inclusive and sustainable development and thus embrace a new way of being missional in the world.

Social movements are mechanisms by which oppressed people move from the periphery of a system to its centre by which they struggle for justice and freedom. Poulouse Mangai introduces the characteristics of these movements and proposes that the Church should join hands with such movements as it goes well with Jesus' mission and ministry. Authentic social movements may be regarded as the movements of the Spirit for transforming the world. Maria Arul Raja highlights one such movement, the Dalit and Subaltern movement. He demonstrates by several cases that in spite of several existing legal provisions, the rights of the subalterns are still denied everywhere and they are not integrated in the main stream of Indian society. The Church should take a clear stand in favour of the subalterns and become a catalyst in the process of their emancipation by giving them a critical education and formation.

Religions do have a place in the civil society, and all religions must reform themselves by assuming their inspirational, prophetic and active role in civil society. The first step is that every religion should abandon its absolute claim and recognize the legitimacy of all authentic religions. Sebastian Painadath briefly presents the attitudinal change of Christianity towards other religions with Vatican II and the calls for dialogue and collaboration among the religions. He outlines the recent theological developments in Western theology in the approach to other religions. In the last article Oliver Inchody invites the attention of the readers to the

impending catastrophe of our Mother Earth and to respond to it urgently without wasting a moment. The only way out from this serious crisis is attitudinal change and radical reform in the life-style of everybody. From the inherent human tendency of domination over nature and unlimited exploitation of its resources, we have to move to the posture of nurturing and protecting nature and admire the infinite mystery of the universe and its wonderful eco-system.

We have not comprehensively dealt with the areas of the agenda, nor the list of items in the agenda complete. We promise that this agenda will be taken up further and expanded in another number. We are glad to have just introduced part of the agenda in this number and hope that it will inspire our readers to continue the search and renew their commitment to their mission in the civil society along with all other players.

Kuncheria Pathil

Jeevadhara, Kottayam

Kuncheriap@gmail.com

Church in Civil Society: Inspirational and Prophetic

Patrick G.

By historically situating the contours of civil society, this article argues that the inspiration of the Church remains as an abiding and embedded one in the development of civil society. It presents the case that today, in a context when there is a special need for the role of civil society, and the possibility of faith-based communities playing greater roles, the Church should dynamically reinvent its specific contribution in terms of the twin principles of evoking faith in a transcendent God, and prophetically inspiring egalitarian social relationship. The author, Gnana Patrick, is the Head of the Department of Christian Studies at the University of Madras.

There is an apparent revival of interest in civil society today, reflecting the gradual transference of power from centres of political and economic systems to people-based initiatives and voluntary organisations. The once powerful welfare states are weakening, multinational companies have come to play havoc with socio-political processes, and the people are required to rely upon their own powers and resources to govern and lead themselves. Such change-over cuts across nations and regions, and promotes global networking of people. Transnational voluntary organisations, including faith-based organisations, have come to play significant roles in socio-cultural and political processes. Church, with its multi-dimensionality of being a faith-based community, a voluntary organisation for social welfare, an organisation with transnational networks, an institution with recognisable political influence, etc. is a major player in the civil society today. That takes us to an exercise of

understanding and exploring further the nature of the role of the Church in civil society, and examine whether it is inspirational and prophetic.

Contours of Civil Society

The thought on civil society, from its earliest days, has stood for not one, but different spheres of life and activities. The earliest idea of it is to be found in the writings of Aristotle, who spoke of it as *koinonia politike*, pointing to the political community which represented the citizens of the Greek city-states. Since it was a sphere wherein the elite 'citizens' took part, it did not become widely participatory, and therefore, it did not grow and spread through history. However, the idea re-emerged again during the modern era, when individuals, as agents seeking to free themselves from heteronymous powers, began to assert their place in the decision making process. John Locke (1632-1704), one of the early modern political philosophers to formulate themes on civil society, thought of it again in the model of the Greek city-state, wherein aristocratic citizens freely participated in political decision-making. In his opinion, civil society was nothing but the very political society itself.

As the processes of modernisation unfolded, and as capitalist mode of production took hold of the economic process, the idea of civil society began to shift its terrain from the political to the economic sphere. The producers and the industrialists began to assert their freedom to pursue trade and mercantile activities without interference from the states - the monarchical states of the time. Hegel (1770-1831) appreciated their assertiveness, and considered these initiative taking, enterprising bourgeoisie as the pristine actors of civil society, calling it *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. With their rights for private property duly affirmed, these bourgeoisie were said to constitute an independent space, unfettered by the state.

It was to this understanding of civil society that Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) reacted to, and dumped hastily the whole idea of civil society as bourgeois. However, while Marx explained away the civil society as a mere super-structural reality, not having any substantive reality of its own, Gramsci saw something

consequential about it. He found it playing an effective role in maintaining the hold of the ruling bourgeois class by controlling the consciousness of the people, and therefore he spoke of the proletarian need to take control of it. His reflections opened up a line of thought that 'since civil society was doing a substantive role for the bourgeoisie, it could do a similar role for the liberation of the proletariat as well'. This insight helped explore the role the religio-cultural organisations were playing or could play in social transformation.

The contemporary debate on civil society began by the last quarter of the twentieth century, when the world experienced vibrant actors in the form of movements and organisations, cultural and religious institutions, which formed neither part of the political society, nor that of the state nor of the economic system. These actors, across the nations, became a significant force fighting for the rights of the underprivileged, socially oppressed, ethnically marginalised people, etc. The world, therefore, came to recognise these forces, and began to classify the space these actors were occupying as *independent* and *autonomous* from the state, the political society, the economic productive system, and from the family environment as well.

Soon enough, well-known political theorists began to question the claim of 'independent', 'autonomous' space of the civil society, pointing out to the domination of civil society by forces of exploitation and unfreedom as well. Neera Chandhoke, an important political theorist in the Indian context, spoke of the conceits of civil society.¹ Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929 -), in his influential work *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, lamented that the once-prevalent public sphere, as found for example in the coffee houses of Europe had disappeared due to the colonisation of the life-world by the technocratic systems. Yet others pointed out that civil society always remained merged with the political society, the state and its components.

¹ Cf. Neera Chandhoke, *The Conceits of Civil Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Civil Society: Salient Features

Braving the criticism, the contemporary civil society activists and theoreticians find greater value in it, especially in our global age wherein the organised States are abdicating much of their responsibilities under the 'dictates' of multinational companies. They hold on to the validity and relevance of certain important features of civil society as follows:

1. A *dynamic*, not a static, space *relatively* independent from the state, economic system, family and individual: It is an empirical fact that the a group of NGOs, interest-based voluntary groups, faith-based voluntary organisations, religious organisations, professional groups, consumer protection groups, etc., have increased significantly during the last quarter of the twentieth century. They unmistakably point to the presence of a relative degree of independence from the state machinery, economic systems, family units, and individual selves.
2. Emergence in this space of voluntary initiatives or organisations which operate to strengthen the rights of the individual as well as of communities: Human rights discourse has been one of the salient discourses in the public sphere today; similarly, identity centred discourses based on language, region, religion, minority status, oppressed status, marginal categories, too have emerged boldly during the last twenty to thirty years.
3. People's participation in governance and in collective endeavours for common good: Focus on *governance*, rather than *government*, has been an important turn in the civil society discourse in the recent times. After a phase of concentration on human rights discourse, which seemed to stress the rights of the individual, a concern has emerged to strengthen the case for the participation of grassroots people in public governance in different ways. And all these efforts, needless to say, orient themselves towards the common good.
4. Formation of a public sphere that contributes to strengthening of the democratic polity: Public sphere is the arena where public debates take place, contributing to the formation of the general will of the people. These debates, informed by knowledge and ethical consciousness, shape the political will of the people. Media plays an

important role in this process. While civil society is not identical with this public sphere, the latter is an important feature of a vibrant civil society.

5. Formation of a participatory democracy and egalitarian society based on justice: A civil society stands for an egalitarian ideal, based on liberty and justice. These values differentiate a people-based civil society from an elitist, bourgeois one. This distinction is vital, because we do find the emergence of elitist civil society² which pretends to be neutral, but cater to the needs of the middle and upper classes, inducing an amnesia of the poor and marginalised people of our society.

Vitality of Religion for Civil Society

While these features turn our focus upon the spaces of civil society, contemporary times have produced much debate about the relationship of religion to civil society. On one end of the spectrum, we have voices which deny a role for religion in the arena of civil society, and, on the other end, there are those rightist forces – theocratic states for example, which go about running governments with religious mandates. Thus we have those who wish to disestablish religion in the civil and public sphere on the one hand, and those who wish to establish religion at all levels of state making on the other. Between these two extremes, we have voices today which discuss the role of religion in the civil and political society *within the framework of constitutional democracies*. It is with these voices that the Church would align itself to reflect about its role and functions in the civil society.

Whether the Church can be part of the civil society – whether a community constituted on the basis of Faith in a transcendent God could be a civil society or part of a civil society is a hotly debated question

² Much has been said about the nature of the mobilisation in recent times against corruption by Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal. While we do find positive elements in these mobilisations, the absence of substantive concerns related to social justice, alleviation of poverty, land reforms, and reservation policy make us suspect them of elitism and alienation from grassroots people.

today. Richard Rorty, a well-known post-modern philosopher from the US, argues that religion is a 'conversation stopper' in the public sphere and therefore inimical to civil society. His negative stance is based upon the 'incommensurability' theory regarding the relationship between different religions or the different 'comprehensive doctrines'. The incommensurability theory is one born out of a linguistic-cultural approach to knowledge, reality, and communication, and this theory tends to be reductive, tending towards the position of impossibility of communication beyond one's linguistic world.

The critical theorists, who initiated a re-thinking on the Enlightenment Rationality, have taken a less antagonistic and a more positive look at religion's role for social transformation. Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and others of the Frankfurt school have pursued a qualified approach to religion, verging on a critical appreciation.³ Jurgen Habermas, the well known critical theorists of the twentieth century, has veered round to a positive stance from his earlier stance of resistance to the public role of religion in the civil society. The conversation he had with Pope Benedict expressed this viewpoint.⁴ His latest stance, with a caveat that religions should 'translate' their communication with others in the public sphere, respects the role of religion in regenerating humanity from its imprisonment in technocratic rationality.

John Rawls, the well known liberal theorist, speaking about the different religio-ethical systems as 'comprehensive doctrines', proposes the possibility of drawing inspirations from these doctrines, provided they *translate* themselves to others in the public squares. There is a debate that goes on upon the question of *translation* of religious doctrines into secular categories of communication. There are those who find it difficult, if not impossible, to *translate* the religious messages, fearing the loss of vitality of religion. Those who hold on to this difficulty, speak of *being*

³ Cf. Eduardo Mendieta ed., *The Frankfurt School on Religion – Key Writings by the Major Thinkers* (NY: Routledge, 2005).

⁴ Cf. Jurgen Habermas and Joseph Benedict Ratzinger, *Dialectics of Secularisation – On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006).

hospitable to others than *translating* their traditions to others. Whatever be the dynamics they suggest, the debaters in the European-American context, are growing positive towards the role of religion in the civil society, especially in the global context wherein there is a need to integrate the role of religion to regenerate humanity from the domination of market systems on the one hand, and of fundamentalism of various hues on the other.

In the Indian context, Andre Betteille, a well-known sociologist in India, thinks that religion, because of its hierarchical nature and dynamics, cannot be part of civil society. Religion, according to him, would be a source of inequality and cannot be a participant in the essentially democratic space of the civil society. But there are others in India who are positive about the role of religion in the public sphere, and they re-envision or re-interpret secularism more openly. Rajeev Bhargava is one of the well-known proponents of open-secularism for India. He propounds the ideal of secularism as enshrined in the Indian context as a positive doctrine towards religion, and oriented towards fulfilment of justice to the Indian people.⁵ It is interesting to note that some of the activist-scholars, e.g. V. Geetha,⁶ too speak about the public role of faith, especially as a transformative potential for the subaltern people.

That the danger of religious fundamentalism is looming large in the Indian context is a real challenge to reckon with. An extreme reaction to this danger would be to rigidify the doctrine of secularism, and refuse any role for religion in civil society or public sphere. On the other end, going by the general resurgence of religion in the public sphere, people can become fundamentalistic about the public role of religion. While the hard-core secularists should realise the positive potentials of religion, the fundamentalists should respect the dynamic autonomy of the public sphere, constituted by multiple others.

⁵ Cf. Rajeev Bhargava, *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶ Cf. V. Geetha and Nalini Rajan, *Religious Faith, Ideology, Citizenship* (London: Routledge, 2011).

Church in Civil Society: An Embedded Inspiration

It is in this context that the Church proposes to play an inspirational and prophetic role in civil society. It may well be surmised that Church and civil society are kindred concepts, having an historical affinity to one another. Originating with Jesus and his itinerant followers, encountering the Divine in a traumatic way in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus, receiving a powerfully affirmative spiritual experience at the event of Pentecost, an outwardly forward looking people became the nucleus of the early Church. They progressively formed a community, whose nature and functions were quite distinct from the then existing groupings of people in the Palestinian context. This was a spirited community, living out an eschatological hope, combined with a radical sense of participation and sharing. The system of sharing (Acts 2: 44-45; 4: 32-35) that arose in the early Church was a singular example of the spirit of participation and sharing that the community experienced. It offered an alternative model of community life, a life that went beyond ascriptive ties, gathered together around the experience of the Spirit of God. There are many good examples in the life of the early Church, which show how they went beyond ascriptive ties. The salient one was the ability of the early Church to go beyond the boundaries of Judaism by deciding not to impose the practice of circumcision upon the non-Jewish Christians coming from the Hellenistic world. The definitive proclamation of Paul in his letter to the Galatians (3: 28) that 'there is no discrimination as Jew, Gentile, slave, male, female, etc.' was the typical character of the community of the early Church.

This alternate community inspired a living based on the two-fold principles of faith in a transcendent creator God and praxis of loving relationship among creatures. These principles, combination of a vertical and a horizontal dimension of faith, propelled a radical praxis of community, with an absolute sense of equality that broke down human-made hierarchies. Due to its radicality, down through the centuries, it infused vitality for egalitarian communitarian living on the one hand, and was sought to be domesticated by the dominant powers of the time on the other. Birth of monasteries was a singular instance of the practice of this radical vision of community, when the institutional Church went with the powers that be. Thus the real Church, the radical experience of

community, journeyed along space and time, rejuvenated through the vibrant initiatives of prophetic individuals and collectives.

St. Augustine spoke of the Church as a pilgrim community, journeying towards the city of God, even while partaking of the temporal realities of the earthly city. This temporal city, according to Augustine, was 'this world', the *saeculum*, the rudiment of the secular city to emerge later in history. Church was the very inspiration to this earthly city, even while pilgrimaging towards the eternal city of God. Augustine was thus proposing the Church to be an alternate community to the then existing Roman empire - a power that believed in self-glory and not in a transcendent power.

Second half of the second millennium of the Christian era witnessed substantive events in relation to the journey of faith of the Church. It was the epoch of modernity. Major events like scientific discoveries, Enlightenment thinking, French revolution and industrial revolution gave birth to the era of modernity. During this era, Christianity, through its teaching centring on *Imago Dei*, played a vital role in bringing forth an anthropocentric consciousness. The Reformation movement played a vital role in propagating a sense of 'democracy' - the political essence of modernity, by underlining the priesthood of the believers (a decentralisation of the spiritual authority), and instilling confidence among the wider believing public to read, understand, and become able to receive the Divine revelations without the priestly mediation. Birth of the welfare nation-states has much to do with the inspiration of the Church as a community of sharers of resources. Thus the epochal events of modernity carried the abiding inspiration of the Church, and the latter played its catalytic role as leaven in the flour.⁷

⁷ It is also argued that this modernity is part and parcel of the exploitative system of capitalism. While granting that an aspect of this modernity, especially its calculative instrumentalist rationality goes with the profit-oriented capitalist motivation, I surmise that the whole project of modernity cannot be reduced to this instrumentalist rationality. One needs to situate oneself in a context to appreciate the various aspects of modernity. Looking at it from a subaltern perspective, especially as situated in the Indian context, the emancipatory aspects of modernity with its own specific kind of rationality, find their relevance. It is therefore to say that the Christian inspiration in modernity, i.e. its communitarian and egalitarian elements, should not be brushed aside under the fallacy of an overarching generalisation of post-modernity.

Modernity, with an embedded inspiration of the Church, has gone about playing an empowering role as it spread throughout the globe during the colonial era. In his *The Acknowledged Christ of Indian Renaissance*, M. M. Thomas has highlighted this aspect of modernity, befitting to the Indian context. Needless to say that modernity went with the process of colonisation, a major event during the second part of the second millennium. Today, we realise more and more the ill-effects of colonialism. The post-colonial criticism has shed might light on this matter. But, a much qualified post-colonial criticism from the subaltern stance is yet to emerge. It will not be difficult to understand the fact that colonialism, and the aspects of modernity it spread, did result in the subaltern people waking up to challenge the ascriptive ties, especially the ones like caste in India. The missionary endeavour, which went side by side with the colonial enterprise, did contribute to the spread of modern education, spread of Enlightenment values like liberty, equality and fraternity in the colonised countries. Democratisation of the sphere of education, inculcation of the Enlightenment values, enabling a public sphere to emerge with the aid of print media, empowering the periphery of the Indian society through various measures, etc. were the ways through which the Church contributed to the emergence of civil society in the Indian context. This contribution remains as an embedded contribution in the history of modern India.

Church in Civil Society Today

Today the Church needs to continue to play its catalytic role in the public sphere and civil society. In the foregoing pages of this essay, it has been noted that the Church, as an alternate community, mediated life in terms of the twin principles of faith in a transcendent God, and a non-hierarchical relationship among living beings. These two dimensions had an abiding role in shaping up the agency of the actors in the civil society, whether as economic agents or as NGO activists. Today, we need to reclaim the vitality of these two dimensions in order for the Church to become inspirational and prophetic in the civil society.

1. First of all, the Church needs to rejuvenate itself so as to be able to mediate the faith in a transcendent God for our contemporary times. Among other things, one of the serious hurdles we face for

our public life today is fundamentalism. The two most visible forms of fundamentalism that we witness today are market fundamentalism and religious fundamentalism. Market fundamentalism, with its TINA (*There Is No Alternative*) syndrome, advances forcefully with neo-liberal economic forces. It cultivates a flair for consumerism, produces even a 'gospel' of prosperity, makes us exuberant in the presence of consumerist goods, and ultimately incapacitates us with regard to the ability for the experience of transcendence. Our search seems to end with accumulation of consumerist goods. It is nothing short of idolatry, which substitutes the market goods for the transcendent God. This form of fundamentalism advances along with the growth of the relentlessly consuming class of people. The other form of fundamentalism that we suffer most today is the one implicating religion. Religious resources come handy for those who wish to dominate over others. In their frantic attempts at domination and exploitation, they freeze the religious symbols, in order to instrumentalise them for their narrow ends. Religious resources are drained of their hermeneutical vitality. As a result, religions lose their capacity for transcendence, endangering the future of all living beings. Against this context, the Church has to contribute significantly in the civil sphere to resist the very formation of fundamentalism. It must promote a healthy living free from the market urges, and inspire dialogue of life, bringing together different religions in a dialogical mutuality poised towards the common good.

2. Secondly, the Church, as a prophetic agent of an egalitarian society, should continue to interrogate and weaken the multiple forms of domination and hierarchy that get generated in the world today. The dynamics of domination are obtaining subtler forms today, but they maintain and reinforce hierarchical domination effectively. They are operative both within and outside the church walls. It is a necessity to guard against the forces of domination within the churches as well as in the wider society. Casteism in the Indian context is a typical case in point. The operation of casteism has become subtler in our world, a world increasingly being dominated by knowledge economy. The IT world seems to open up bright economic avenues for the hitherto excluded people – the Dalits, the Tribals, the women,

etc. Without denying the empowerment these excluded people experience in today's world, we need to go beyond the surface level to note the fact that these people remain excluded at more substantive levels. A study published in *Economic and Political Weekly* shows the exclusion of the subaltern people from substantive positions across multinational companies.⁸ While this being the case in the wider world outside, what takes place within the churches are clear anti-witnesses to the inspirational role of the Church. Scandalously, some of the churches, including the Pentecostal ones, are promoting caste-based ethnic identities by way of increasing upon their social leverage for power and domination. Church in India cannot go with an elitist understanding and practice of civil society. True to its historical contribution, or in continuity with what it has been doing, it must take a clear option for creating or strengthening a people-based civil society.

The resonances that emerge from the person of Pope Francis are meaningful in this regard. He asks of us to 'open the future for God', thereby helping the world to continue to experience the transcendent God in our lives, and shows good examples by bringing the non-interactive opponents together, like for example, the Palestinian and Israel leaders. They are good openings, and good examples of the public role the Church can play today. We need to open up many more civil spaces for God in whom we humans, along with the whole of creation, have our living.

⁸ Cf. D. Ajit, Han Donker, and Ravi Saxena, "Corporate Boards in India – Blocked by Caste?", *EPW*, vol. XLVII, No. 32, August 11, 2012, 39-43.

Situating Church in the Vision of Inclusive Development

Antony Kalliath

The author advocates that the Church should be an agency in civil society of an 'inclusive development' and embrace a new way of being 'missional' in the world. The Gospel truth is meant to be a 'public truth' embodying a public meaning in our age of knowledge and communication. He clarifies the notion of inclusive economics and inclusive development by which the quality of life of every person to be enhanced. Antony Kalliath CMI is a well-known theologian and currently he is the President of *Indian Theological Association* and the Director of Divyodaya Dialogue Centre at Coimbatore.

The epithet, 'inclusive' has turned out to be the buzz of the on-going discourses both on public and religious domains. Politicians, sociologists and economists indulge in the talk of an inclusive economics, inclusive politics, inclusive education, inclusive development, inclusive governance etc. Moreover, this inclusive vision is latent in the on-going political debate on the shift from the Westminster representative democracy to participatory and substantive democracy in Asian context; a paradigm shift from a bureaucratic 'government' to people intensive 'governance'. Why then not an inclusive Church and Ecclesiology to vibrate with the present political and economic discourses? Why not people specific inclusive spirituality and inclusive faith? Not in the distant past, we were occupied with 'integral' and 'holistic' development in the Church's mission. Now, the new advocacy of inclusive development looks resourceful and appealing as we figure out a responsive and receptive Ecclesiology towards the claims of the present *ethos* and *pathos*.

1. Reality Bytes

It looks appropriate that our discussion on an inclusive Church must be prefaced with a few reality bites. Over the past few decades, at least in the public perception, an 'ethos of exclusion' has been prevailing in Church's approach and decisions to diverse issues happening worldwide. When we read the following things together, Sacramental exclusions on politicians who were deemed to not have sufficiently promoted Catholic teaching in their legislative exercises,¹ the Catholicism's stance which excludes women from priestly ordination, the divorced and remarried from Eucharistic communion, the gays from sacramental or even civil marriages, Church's intolerance towards theologians who venture to think out of box, increasing centralization of Church's governance, the controversial documents like *Dominus Iesus*² which is widely perceived non-ecumenical and non-dialogical especially among other Churches and in the Parliament of Religions, the profile of the Church that is being constructed in the public square is exclusionary and inward-looking. Some see in the above mentioned episodes a "neo-exclusivism" being choreographed out of our fear on the onslaught of the woolly pluralism of the Postmodernism. As someone put it, "a whiff of Donatism" unaware finding place in the over/misplaced enthusiasm of the Orthodoxy to keep it pure and perfect.³ The purpose of this paper is not to look into the merits or demerits of Church's positioning in these episodes. No doubt Church's stances on above mentioned cases could indeed be defended in our intra-religious discussions. But what I wanted to drive home is that our theological stance and teachings are widely debated in today's secular media, and in the present democracies

¹ To cite a few example: US bishops' public dissent to the Obama health care legislation (2009), the questioning of the propriety of the University of Notre Dame's granting of an honorary degree to the sitting president of the US

² *Dominus Iesus*: Non-Catholic Christian communities "suffer from defects" (#17); Non-Christian religions are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the church, have the fullness of the means of salvation" (22)

³ Paul Lakeland, "Reflections on the "Grace of Self-Doubt" in Dennis M. Doyle, Timothy J. Furry and Pascal D. Bazzell (eds), *Ecclesiology and Exclusion, Boundaries of Being and Belonging in Postmodern Times* (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2012), 16.

that have come of age. It is not through exclusion but through inclusion that competency as well as credibility of the Gospel must be earned in public for the efficient dissemination of the Good News. Doing theology in public should be seen as an opportunity to give testimony to Jesus and his Gospel in the 'Parliament of Religions' and civil society. Church's deeper involvement and opting to be vulnerable in the secular space speak of the resourcefulness and the optimism of the Gospel.

In today's world, leadership is credibility and credibility is leadership. Credibility corresponds to public receptivity especially in the present visual culture and knowledge world. Truth becomes verily truth (*satyasa satyam*) in the hermeneutics of receptivity. Otherwise truth remains a non-relational neutral *idea* (*aletheia*), or a distant immutable referent, enclosed in itself. Evidently, Gospel truth (*emet*) is a live-testimony (not an esoteric idea or ideology) since it is innately incarnational, interactive, historical, existential and covenantally processive till the Eschaton. It has to become 'popular' (not populist) so much so that the 'sacred' shall be celebrated in the 'secular'. It implies that the Gospel truth should become 'public truth', and must embody 'public meaning' in the present age of knowledge. We are living in exponential times: There are 31 billion searchers on Google every month. The first commercial text message was sent in Dec. 1992. Today the number of text messages sent and received everyday exceeds the total population of the planet. It is estimated that 4 exabytes of unique information will be generated in this year. This is more than the previous 5000 years. The amount of new technical information is doubling in every two years. For students starting a four year technical degree means that the half of what they learn in their first year of study will be out-dated by their third year of study!⁴ We are living in an exciting epoch of fluidity and creativity, in which the constant is change, the context is ever unfolding.

In this challenging and innovative scenario what is needed now is a competent ecclesiology grounded in a convincing Christology *in-public* so that the Gospel becomes relevant and credible and the Church turns out to be an agency of transformation in the present times of 'revolutions' on all spheres of life. Jesus did his theology in public, and de-privatized

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TKbIidbyhk>

and 'de-spiritualized' religion and transmuted its dynamic into an inclusive, open, dialogical, people specific movement so much so it became all-embracing agency of transformation in all spheres and segments of life. The on-going discourse on inclusive development on the political spectrum offers a new horizon as well as context while envisioning an inclusive Church in the present political and social scenario of India.

2. 'Private' to 'Public'

The revolution that Jesus has pioneered is the radical shift from the private domain to public space in the understanding of religion and its praxis. For him, the economy of salvation was not a private, esoteric endeavour to be indulged in exclusive conclaves as advocated by the Essenes and other Jewish sects. Jesus' advocacy interrogated their Puritanism and critiqued the exclusive, elitist theology of Pharisees and Scribes which was built upon an inward looking ethnocentric elect consciousness. He unveiled a new religious culture and legacy on the spectrum of social justice, human rights and human dignity, gender equity in the inclusive vision of Kingdom of God. To phrase differently, he de-privatized religious legacies in their singular identities, and reconstructed the idea of Religion and God in an inclusive cultural domain and social bandwidth where nobody was excluded in the vision of 'Fullness of life'. That is to say the integrity of Kingdom of God was construed and constructed through an inclusive logic and vision which harboured and fostered harmony of life. Harmony of life is the celebration of differences, multiple and layered identities in an inclusive narrative. To phrase it more philosophically, Jesus' idea of Reign of God is fundamentally grounded in the contiguity, communion and simultaneity of existence which is constructed through praxis of networking of every segment and section of the society. He sustained a continuum of every aspect of human life be it politics, or economy, or culture or social or religion; his occupation was bonding the secular and sacred while his contemporaries were preoccupied with the divide between this world and the other world.

Jesus' inclusive Reign of God was programmed through a radical hospitality exercised in an open and inclusive 'table fellowship' with the people on the margins -sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors. Jesus' subversion of the "table-etiquette" is a prophetic critique of the prevailing

exclusionary practice of the Judeo-Greco-Roman world. “Table-Fellowship” gestates, nurtures, and fosters an egalitarian community in its non-hierarchical and inclusive space of hospitality, exercised through radical recognition of, and profound listening to the ‘other’ as ‘god’ – *adidhi devo bhava*.

3. ‘Exclusive’ to ‘Inclusive’

The uniqueness of Christian identity as translated in Jesus’ Kingdom ministry and in his priorities and options primarily rests not on an exclusive logic but on an inclusive ontology of Incarnational ubiquity of the Immanuel. It works on a principle of “Holy is wholly”, as Karl Barth put it. The Second Vatican Council would articulate the principle of inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God through “God’s universal salvific Will” (*Missio Dei*) in the already-ness of the Kingdom of God in virtue of Resurrection. What is accomplished in the idea and praxis of Kingdom of God is a coincidence of the ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ and bringing about a new mutually clarifying equity and equilibrium, creative synthesis and harmony between dusty and divine. It is precisely in the reconciliation of ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ in the Risen Christ that the grammar of a theology of Inclusive Development is to be explored and experimented.

4. Inclusive Economics for Welfare-State

Till 1960s expressions like “economic growth”, “economic development” are used interchangeably as if they are synonyms. Since 21st century, new terms like “sustainable growth”, “inclusive growth”, “and integral growth” have been in currency in the purview of Welfare State. Economic growth is a quantitative idiom in the discourses on economic theories. It is interpreted in terms of increase/decrease in real GDP occurring over a period of time. It gives only an aggregate picture of increase and decrease of goods and services. Since it does not reflect on the distribution of wealth, the GDP is not a genuine index of the economic wealth of a country. But there are many cases in which there is significantly high rate of *per capita* income, and yet poverty and destitution are the order of the day. UNDP (United Nations Development Report) points to this anomaly and insists to insert “Welfare-Values” in the development index.⁵ It is in this context that the advocacy of Inclusive

⁵ UNDP Human Development Report 2004 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 139ff.

Development acquires acceptance in the on-going political and economic discourses in the horizon of a welfare state.

The *Inclusive Development* as enshrined in Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-08 - 2013) is a composite economic idea and praxis. Twelfth Five Year Plan 2013 -2017) which is still in the making, and continues to hold the logistics of 11th Five Year plan, proposes “faster, more inclusive and sustainable growth”. While surfing through the texts of the 11th and 15th Five Year Plan, one will not miss its emphasis on broad-based improvement in the quality of life of the people, especially the poor, SCs/STs, other backward castes (OBCs), minorities and women. The target is not just faster growth but also inclusive growth, that is, a growth process which benefits and ensures equality of opportunity for all. The Meaning of Inclusiveness as delineated in the 12th Plan indicates the following:

1. Inclusiveness as Poverty Reduction: ensuring an adequate flow of benefits to the poor and the most marginalised
2. Inclusiveness as Group Equality: it is not mere a poverty reduction perspective; it includes consideration of the status of the group as a whole relative to the general population as well.
3. Inclusiveness as Regional Balance
4. Inclusiveness also means greater attention to income inequality
5. Inclusiveness as Empowerment: not just about ensuring a broad-based flow of benefits or economic opportunities, it is also about empowerment and participation ; building a participatory democracy that people are no longer prepared to be passive recipients of benefits
6. Environmental sustainability

The various schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), Mid Day Meals (MDMs), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and various Acts like RTI, RTE, Right to Food, Land Bill all commensurate the idea and ideal of Inclusive Development in the present political scenario and economic discourses in India.

5. “Fourth-World”

Inclusive Development is not mere an economic growth or idea but is an all-embracing vision and praxis; its components of Development index are of different genre and genius and vibes with Jesus’ idea of God’s Reign. In this context a brief reference to *Fourth World* as envisioned by a renowned neo-Communist philosopher and a scientist, M.P. Parameshwaran seems appropriate.⁶ The twine salient features of ‘Fourth World’ constructed on the theory of inclusive development are i) Responsible participation and ii) Quality of Life.

Responsible Participation in the decision process is the code and core of the ideal inclusive Development: Development is not mere accumulation of material wealth but implies opportunities for the individual’s involvement in the building up of a new society. Employment in this purview is not merely an economic need but it also implies political participation and cultural expression. Moreover decentralization of power is the important means to achieve a development in which a responsible and collective participation of the whole society is made possible. *Panjayath raj* (village administrative system) is considered as the best forum in this regard in Indian context. It rests on the empowerment of the people who are themselves the very solution; they are the masters, agents and beneficiaries of the social transformations. The ideal is that the citizenry exercise their franchise through collective responsibility through people’s governance.

Quality of life is another important component in assessing development and social justice. In socialist or capitalist society, the quality of life is customarily assessed in terms of gross national product, *per capita* income, and consumption rate. There can be two sets of norms to assess the quality of life according to the “Fourth World” vision: Physical (or material) Quality of Life (PQL or MQL), namely, longevity of life, sustainability, purchasing capacity, social security, health care, land reform etc.

⁶ See, M.P. Parameshwaran , *Nalan Lokam [Fourth World]* 3rd Edition, (Kottayam: D.C. Books, 2004).

Secondly, Spiritual Quality of Life (SQL): namely, primary education, adult literacy, literacy of women and their well-being, higher education, increased participation in cultural events and sport and games, higher economic participation in society, higher political participation.

“Welfare-Values” in the understanding of economic development critically upholds the “Emancipation-Index” according to the “Fourth-World” idea. It means that the amount and quality of time spent for cultural life, sports and enjoyment are decisive indexes of a developed society. In the former times there were seemingly only three dear concerns: food to live, self-defence, sexual life. “Welfare values” in the development vision emphasizes human quality along with the biological existence of humans. More quality time and space can be achieved in two ways: i) Fast and massive production through industry and ii) Wisdom and discretion which help one to distinguish need from greed. The first path will cause the depletion of natural resources; it ultimately leads to regress rather than progress.

This brings us to the concept of development in terms of “Sustainability Index”. The increasing consumerist needs lead to inordinate exploitation of the resources of nature. When the balance between the human consumption and the supply from nature is lost the resultant will be regression. Today, it is an accepted fact that the resources of nature are not infinite and inexhaustible. It is oft predicted that if the present volume of consumption continues the very survival of humankind on the planet of earth will be threatened in a distant future. The vision as well as the order of the new society must incorporate the survival of the future generations. One of the key economic principles, which takes care of the future generation is the policy based on ‘recycling of the nature resources’. “Recycling” is the Alchemistic wisdom of the nature to be inexhaustible and ever resourceful; human logic is to respect and recognize nature’s self- propelling proficiency, and incorporate the ‘economics of the nature into the Development Concept. Both decreasing consuming needs and increasing recycling will promote the sustainability of the society.⁷ Sustainability index corroborates along with longevity

⁷ The on-going debates are on themes like “infinite development vs discreet development”, “limits of growth” (Club of Rome Report, 1962), anthropocentric vs eco-centric

and emancipation index in the assessment of the development in the vision of new society. In sum, an integrated Life-Quality index can be defined as the sum of the three indexes, namely, Longevity, Emancipation and Sustainability.

Moreover, the ‘Fourth World’ vision of the “Quality of Life” upholds “Spiritual Quality of Life” (SQL) which entails social quality (life), cultural quality (life) and participation quality (partnership between man and woman).⁸

To put the above discussion in perspective, the advocacy of Inclusive Development and ‘Welfare Values’ in the understanding of economic development and justice is deeply rooted in a cultural revolution for a new humanity. Such a cultural revolution is not the consequence of economic revolution. Rather it must happen before, or along with the economic revolution. Neo Marxist thinkers like Samir Amin, would say that Cultural revolution takes place only after the economic revolution is the root cause of the failure of socialism; the import of culture was not given due importance in the process of economic revolution. The new alternative to the Neo-liberal capitalism and the Marxian socialism should be in the direction of a new humanist civilization.

6. Inclusive Economics Corresponding to the Sociality of God’s Reign

While going through the literature of eleventh and twelfth Five Year Plan it looks like the imaging of Jesus’ Gospel in the narrative of economic idioms, concepts, arguments and projects. It is verily an Economic testament of Social Gospel which vibes with the Gospel vision and praxis. Indeed we do not find a conscious economic or political theory in Jesus’ Kingdom vision. However, in another sense, the manifestation of God’s reign in Jesus is eminently political and sounds a vision of inclusive development translated through Gospel’s sociality. To declare lepers, tax-collectors, and the poor to be “children of God’s kingdom” is decidedly

development” “environmental justice movements”, “Post-Capitalist Society”, “Village-Urban equilibrium” “Man-Nature equilibrium” “Sustainable rate of exploitation” which offer perspectives towards an alternative of social ordering for the future.

⁸ Parameshwaran, *Fourth-World*, see ch. 7.

a political advocacy and economic statement because such statements are critique on the economic structures of the Jewish establishment of the day. They embody seeds of revolutionary ideas of brotherhood, equality, equity, justice, *ahimsa*, freedom etc. Again, the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come!" is a word of defiance, to pray it is a subversive activity. The authorities sense the ministry of Jesus politically seditious. In the end he is crucified because of what has been interpreted as his "political" positioning. It could be stated that the economy of salvation that Jesus envisioned and practiced is fundamentally construed and constructed in the womb of a Social Gospel which fosters an inclusive economics fostering inclusive development and growth.

We may wisely extrapolate the "practice of Jesus" to our own economic context. We are challenged to let Jesus inspire us to prolong the logic of his own ministry in an imaginative and creative way in terms of people's movement, praxis of religion in the 'secular space', media etc. Mission in the perspective of God's reign includes helping the ones on the hedges and edges on their feet again as having recovered, before God and peoples, their full humanity. In Jesus' ministry God's reign is interpreted as the expression of God's caring authority over the whole of life. The poor and the marginalized owing to historical or religious reasons is the hermeneutical core of the inclusive development. Inclusive Development is not merely an economic theory *per se* but a composite vision and praxis charged with political compassion and cultural underpinnings. It vibes with India's religious vision of *loka samastha sukhino bhavanthu*. It implies approximations and anticipations of God's reign here-now. As in Jesus' Kingdom, the 'poor', is the hermeneutical principle of God's Reign. Pope Francis' words are inspiring in this context: "No one can remain insensitive to the inequalities that persist in the world!" "No amount of peace-building will be able to last, nor will harmony and happiness be attained in a society that ignores, pushes to the margins or excludes a part of itself." (*World Youth Day 2013 Rio de Janeiro*).

To Conclude

Church as it opts to be an agency of 'Inclusive Development' will have to embrace a new way of being missional in the world. What is

needed in this context is an *aggiornamento* of ecclesiology which is not possible, as Gerard Mannion put it, without an “ecclesial humility”.⁹ The Church should be made freed from its ‘donor syndrome’ of salvation! It implies a bold recognition of the holy mystery within which we all are embedded and which relativizes every perspective. Karl Rahner would complement this view by stating that all human beings are incorporated in or related to “people of God” for nobody is outside the embrace of God’s “universal salvific will” (LG). This “holy optimism” (Rahner) permeates every bit and byte of reality.¹⁰ Roger Haight suggests an “ecclesiology from below” – doing ecclesiology “from the trenches”. An ecclesiological approach “from below” nurtures and fosters both epistemological as well as existential humility—it is literally grounded (*humus*).¹¹ Insertion of the Church in the praxis of inclusive development demands a pivotal shift from its gestalt of “*ad gentes*” to “*inter-gentes*” in its witness and testimony following Jesus who has become simultaneously both ‘host’ and ‘hostage’. What is needed to be credible and competitive in the present times is a rebooting of Church’s identity and mission in the matrix of public space of media, movements and knowledge along with the people especially on the margins.

Divyodaya
91, Geetha Hall Road
Coimbatore – 641 030
antonykalliath@gmail.com

⁹ Gerard Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 134 quoted in Paul Lakeland, “Reflections on the “Grace of Self-Doubt” in Dennis M. Doyle, *Ecclesiology and Exclusion*, 13.

¹⁰ Karl Rahner, sj., “Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” in *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda*, ed., Lucien Richard, with Daniel Harrington and John W. O’Malley (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 14. Lakeland, “Grace of Self-Doubt”, 15.

¹¹ Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History* (New York: Continuum 3 vols: vol.1, Historical Ecclesiology, 2004, vol.2, Comparative Ecclesiology 2005, vol.3, Ecclesial Existence 2008. See Dennis M. Doyle, *Ecclesiology and Exclusion*, 29.

Church and Social Movements

Poulose Mangai

The author highlights the characteristics of people's movements and their social function of collective mobilization for change. The Church should regard them as movements of the Spirit for transforming the world, and collaborate with them, of course, with proper discernment. Poulose Mangai SJ teaches systematic and spiritual theology at Vidyajyoti College of Theology, Delhi. His doctoral work is on people's movements and it has been published by ISPCK, Delhi under the title *Spirituality of People's Movements: A Christian Search in the Indian Context* (2012).

1. Introduction

Social movements are an important phenomenon today which, from local to global level, exerts great influence in all domains of human life: social, cultural, economic, political and ecological. There have been many types of social movements in India: peasant movements, tribal movements, dalit movements, women's movements, student movements, labour movements, environmental movements, etc. Until very recently the church in India has been largely indifferent towards them. This article tries to look at the propriety and possibility of the church's involvement with social movements in the contemporary context.

2. Social Movements: Definition

According to T.K. Oommen, social movements are "mechanisms through which men attempt to move from the periphery of a system to its centre." They are conscious efforts by people on the periphery "to mitigate their deprivation and secure justice" and emerge "when men committed to a specified set of goals participate in protest-oriented, purposive collective actions."¹ M.S.A. Rao describes a social movement

as “an organized effort on the part of a section of the population, involving collective mobilization based on an ideology, to bring about changes (either partial or total) in the social system.”² Social movements have three characteristics: collective mobilization, ideology and orientation to change the existing situation. The two crucial factors are collective mobilization and orientation towards change. The third factor of ideology is not as decisive as the other two; some do not even consider it an essential aspect. People participate in movements voluntarily because they share in their ideologies, vibrate with the causes they uphold or see the desirability of the changes they seek to bring into the social order.³

3. The National Alliance of People's Movements

It is beyond the scope of this short article to study select movements for their vision, ideals and praxes. Instead we shall have a look at the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), a coming together of a large number of movements that are active in India today. It may be noted that Fr. Thomas Xavier Kocherry, CSSR (d. 3 May 2014), who founded the Kerala Swatantra Matsyathozhilali Federation and the National Fishworkers Forum in India was a founding member of NAPM and several times its national coordinator.

The NAPM, which emerged in 1992, offers a platform for the movements to exchange views, formulate shared vision and principles, evolve common strategies, and support one another in their separate struggles. It identifies itself as “a collective of diverse people's movements and organizations and likeminded people that struggle across India against injustice, exploitation and communal, ethnic-, caste- and gender-based discrimination.”⁴ It is committed to secular principles and resolutely

¹ T.K. Oommen, *Potest and Change: Studies in Social Movements* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990), 30.

² M.S.A. Rao, ed., *Social Movements in India*, vol. 1, *Peasant and Backward Class Movements* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), x. The quote is from Rao's “Introduction” to the book.

³ A social movement is also called a people's movement. The qualifier ‘people's’ brings out the subaltern nuance of a movement from below. In this article the expressions “social movements”, “people's movements” and “movements” are used synonymously.

opposes religious fundamentalism and communalism. Three characteristic features of NAPM are i) opposition to the prevalent profit-based and market-defined economic policies and development paradigm of the Indian state under the influence of globalisation which are anti-people and hostile to environment, ii) opposition to casteism, communal politics and religious fundamentalism which divide people and destroys social harmony, and iii) search for an alternative paradigm of development which is sustainable, just and non-violent. It believes “in non-violent means of struggle, people’s democracy and respecting the individual identities of diverse people’s movements” and “aspires to develop a discourse of harmonious relationships among various communities based on true democracy and pluralism, and against the threat of fundamentalism and communalism.”

4. Importance of Social Movements in India

The Indian society is marked by grave injustice and violence built into its structures and institutions of civic life. Economic exploitation and social exclusion based on caste, marginalization of large sections of people in the civil and political processes, unfair distribution of the benefits of scientific and economic progress, unequal access to educational and employment opportunities, forced poverty, discrimination against rural people, etc. are all different forms of conflicts, injustice and violence imbedded in our social fabric. The movements are concerned with these issues. They play a vital role in conscientizing the civil society in areas such as human rights, social justice and ecology. They compel the civil society and the state to address issues like poverty, corruption, marginalization of women and girl children, oppression and exploitation of dalits and tribals, iniquity in the distribution of natural resources like water and land, exploitative incursion of MNCs into the nation’s economy, and ecological degradation.

Often in our country, weaker sections do not get opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them. It is often the movements that relentlessly seek to place before the conscience and consciousness of the state and civil society the extreme urgency of

⁴Cited from the web site of NAPM www.napmindia.org

the question of freedom, equality and justice for the exploited, oppressed and underprivileged sections of society. They ask the planners to keep the interest of the nation's poor at the centre of decision-making processes. They ask for decentralization of power in the management of natural resources like land, water and forests in order to ensure justice to local communities. They demand that the state adopt a wider participatory process involving all stakeholders in its pursuit of progress and development which will enhance the quality of our democratic processes besides ensuring greater justice to the vulnerable sections.

Political opacity and bureaucratic secretiveness have time and again proved to be enemies of truth in political processes. Often tens of thousands of people, and sometimes entire communities, are unjustly evicted from their land without prior information and consent and without just compensation. The movements raise the issue of informed consent and uphold people's right to information. Timely dissemination of information serves truth, fairness and equity besides empowering people. It was after long and sustained struggles by movements that the Indian parliament passed the Right to Information Act which provides for citizens the right to access information under the control of public authorities. The Act has become today a valuable tool in the hands of citizens and movements to fight injustice and corruption.

The movements promote secular and humanist values like human dignity, rights, freedom, equality, justice, and harmony which resonate with the secular ethos of the nation as embodied in the Constitution. In our pluralistic context, the ethos of one particular religion or group cannot be the guiding factor for social organization. The movements draw people's attention to the existing or impending threats to peace, justice, human rights, etc. They inspire people to make concerted efforts to protect human rights and to promote ecologically sound developmental policies. They exert moral pressure on state agencies and social institutions to uphold the principles of justice, fairness and equity in the allocation of nation's resources.

The movements create people's leaders and activists who transcend their limited private interests in order more fully to commit themselves to the common good and become agents of change and bearers of a message

of hope. Their association with people's movements often has a radical impact on the lives of a good number of young people who discover that many things that make up their lifestyle are superfluous and at times gravely unjust. They are led to commit themselves to the vision of a more egalitarian and just society which the movements uphold.

5. Church and Movements: Shared Perspectives and Values

A closer look at the principles and praxes of movements will reveal that there are many perspectives, principles and values that both the church and many movements hold in common:

i) **Human Dignity and Human Rights:** For the church and for people's movements human dignity is a primary value. Everyone has a right to live with dignity irrespective of their gender, race, language, region, religion, caste, or socio-political and economic status. The church's social doctrine and the social vision of movements place the human person at the centre of all economic and social processes (cf. GS, 26). Both insist that the organization of political, economic and social life must be at the service of human beings, especially the disprivileged. Further they agree that human dignity is not an abstract principle but a value which needs to become tangible in the actual life of people and communities, in the rights to life and security, livelihood, education, property, gender equity, etc.

ii) **Solidarity with the Poor:** The movements want the pursuit of development to accord priority to the livelihood needs of the weaker sections of society over the consumeristic demands of the elite. In the case of people's movements, solidarity with the poor is seen first of all in being close to the poor who are victims of injustice, oppression or marginalization. Solidarity leads the activists to consistent, sustained and committed involvement in people's struggles for justice, liberation and inclusion. It demands a lot of sacrifices. Solidarity with the socially marginalised was a characteristic trait of the life and mission of Jesus, who sought to defend the human dignity of the despised of his society that included tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes and victims of leprosy. He took the good news of God's reign of love, mercy, justice, reconciliation, and healing into their daily life and struggles. The contemporary church sees solidarity as a fundamental social virtue directed to the common good.

iii) Justice and Empowerment of the Weak: Justice is the chief issue which most people's movements try to address. The priority of the disprivileged with regard to opportunities for education, employment, etc. is integral to their understanding of justice. Gender justice too is a necessary component of social justice. The people's movements are a prophetic reminder in our times of the priority of justice to the oppressed. They call for the empowerment of people, especially the poor and the marginalized. The foundational experience of Israel was the Exodus in which God revealed himself as a God of justice and liberation. The classical prophets were fierce in their condemnation of injustice in the land and violation of the rights of the poor. Amos and Micah laid stress on social morality and justice (cf. Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:7, 11, 24; 8:4-6 and Mic 2:1-5; 3:1-12; 6:6-8; 7:1-6). The message of Jesus, which is good news to the poor (cf. Lk 4:18-19), enjoins upon us the demands of justice in personal and social life. The priority of the downtrodden is a crucial component of the social doctrine of the church which teaches that "*the poor, marginalized and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern.*"⁵

iv) Truth and Nonviolence: Gandhian *satyagraha*, relentless pursuit of truth without minding the cost, is part of the non-violent strategy by which most people's movements challenge the disastrous decisions and practices of the state. Far from being a cowardly withdrawal from fight, it is a forceful resistance to every kind of evil. The movements endeavour to expose the untruths, which create, sustain and perpetuate unjust social conditions by hiding corruption, violence and injustice in society and in political and bureaucratic circles. To stand by truth and in solidarity with the victims of history requires tremendous freedom, an inner capacity to follow what is perceived as good and true. Truth and nonviolence are important for Christians too. Jesus invites us to abjure violence and practise love even in relation to the enemy (cf. Mt 5:38ff; 5:43ff.). Untruth is forbidden in the Decalogue (cf. Ex 20:16; Deut 5:20) and does not become the Christian who has put on the New Man (cf. Col 3:9f; Eph 4:24f; Jas 5:12, 2Cor 1:17f). The church's social doctrine considers truth as a

⁵ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, #182: Italics in the original.

fundamental value in social life. "The more people and social groups strive to resolve social problems according to the truth, the more they distance themselves from abuses and act in accordance with the objective demands of morality."⁶ The freedom that enables one to fight evil within oneself and outside and relentlessly follow the truth is, for the Christian, the liberty in the Spirit.

v) Ecological Sustainability: The contemporary church and many movements stand for a nonconsumeristic and sustainable lifestyle that keeps us from unduly exploiting natural resources. There are several movements that advocate environmentally sustainable technologies in the management of natural resources. The church agrees with such movements that the pursuit of development must be oriented towards creating just, humane and sustainable societies based on harmonious and non-exploitative relationships within and between human communities and between human beings and the eco-system.

The secular ethos of movements vibrates with the vision enshrined in the Constitution of India of a tolerant, compassionate and civilized society in which men and women of every religion and language can live with dignity and in fraternal spirit. This secular vision accords well with the "Kingdom" vision of a human community of justice and love, dignity and equality, freedom and fellowship, brotherhood and sisterhood.

6. Church and Movements: Propriety and Prospects of Engagement

We are in the middle of the golden jubilee years of Vatican II (1962-65) in which the church re-invented itself in the spirit of *aggiornamento* of John XXIII. In the council, the church learnt that it is co-responsible, with others, for the world and its integral wellbeing (cf. *GS*, 34). It is a responsibility it cannot abdicate, if it desires to be true to Jesus who, through incarnation, willingly entered into our history, in order to usher in healing and wholeness, that is, God's salvation. The Council wanted Christians to cultivate and cherish a deep sense of solidarity with the human race and its history. In *Gaudium et spes* we find the foundations

⁶ Ibid., #198.

of the new ecclesiology which places the church right in the midst of the world, inseparably bound to the struggles of men and women for fuller life (cf. *GS*, 1). The post-Conciliar period bears witness to the continued commitment of the church and the *magisterium* to the social vision of the council.

The ecclesial vision of Vatican II, the vital role which people's movements play in the Indian secular context and the values which the church shares with them are reasons enough for the Indian church to engage them. Furthermore contemporary theology and magisterium enable us to see the movements and their struggles as theological events. Samuel Rayan counts people's struggles for human dignity and human rights among the different ways in which God communicates with believers: "God's challenge reaches us also through people's movements and struggles against foul politics and heartless economic practices. It comes to us through struggles for basic rights to life and liberty and elementary human dignity."⁷ The Asian bishops have pointed out a pneumatological dimension of people's struggles:

[W]e recognize with hope "a growing awareness throughout Asia of people's capacity to change unjust structures," with an ever-growing awareness and demand for social justice, for more political and economic participation, for equal opportunities, and the determination to safeguard human dignity and rights. Long-dormant minority groups are seeking ways to become agents of their own social advancement. In this we see the Spirit of God at work in people's struggles and efforts "to transform society so that the human yearning for a more abundant life may be satisfied as God wills" (EA 8).⁸

⁷ Samuel Rayan, "Doing Theology in India," in *Theologizing in Context: Statements of the Indian Theological Association*, edited by Jacob Parappally (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2002), 14.

⁸ From "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service—The Final Statement of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Samphan, Thailand, January 3-12, 2000," in *For All the People's of Asia*, vol. 3, edited by Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), 8. "EA" in the cited text stands for *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999), Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II following 1998 Synod of Asia.

It is then expedient that the church engage and support people's movements. We highlight below some possibilities.

i) There are many movements in India which work to enhance human life, to foster peace and harmony, to create transparent, just, humane and non-violent societies, to overcome inequalities based on gender, race or caste, to bring in peace between warring communities, to eradicate poverty, hunger and disease, to ensure space for the girl child, to set the bonded labourers free, to restore human rights to those who are deprived of them, to conserve the eco-system, and so on. The church may identify such movements at local, regional and national levels and collaborate with them.

ii) There are several movements in India which espouse the cause of subaltern groups and communities. Often it is people's movements which become the effective voice of the poor. The cause of the poor is integral to the cause of the kingdom of God of which the church is a servant. Therefore, when the poor raise their voices through people's movements to claim what is their due, the church must make its own their cause.

iii) Guided by the wisdom of its social doctrine, the church may bring to movements its own perspectives on the causes they champion. It may share with them its legitimate concerns about national life with a view to promoting justice, peace and common good but with utmost sensitivity to the pluralistic ethos of the nation, especially its multi-religious character, keeping in mind the scourge of religious fundamentalism all around us. It will be a good service if the church in India is able to join forces with secular movements to strengthen the secular fabric of society.

iv) The Indian church's support for and collaboration with movements, from parochial to national level, may take various forms. It may be by material support or through personal participation, symbolic support or substantial engagement involving community mobilization, moral support or direct action involving priests, religious and laypeople. The form of support depends on various factors: gravity of the issue, acceptability of church's support, availability of human and material resources, etc. When a movement launches a major initiative, it requires conscientization and mobilization of people, transport, accommodation and food for activists, preparation and distribution of publicity materials, political lobbying,

facilities for computer, internet and use of social media, etc. All these require finances, facilities and personnel for which the movement depends on the generosity of concerned citizens and sympathetic organisations. The various sorts of requirements listed above open a wide variety of options for the church in cooperating with people's movements.

v) There are already many Christians—priests, religious and laypeople—who are involved in different degrees in movements and action groups working for people's rights. The Indian church at different levels needs to appreciate and encourage them, without intruding into the secular and autonomous character of the concerned movements. There is need to sensitise church personnel to the struggles of ordinary people. Immersion into people's struggles will be a very fruitful way of doing it. It may be recommended as a component in the formation programmes of seminarians and religious in India. Interaction with committed activists, especially in the early stages of formation, will help form lasting attitudes and build up strong character. They will learn from the poor how to share one's life with one's brothers and sisters and how to make life meaningful and fruitful by living for others.

The Indian church has already many mechanisms built into its structures at different levels to attend to the concerns of the subaltern sections. They include various commissions like Commission for Justice, Peace and Development, Commission for SC/ST/BC, Commission for the Laity, and Commission for Women at the national, regional and local levels. Such organs can facilitate church's engagement with movements. However, a word of caution is necessary. Co-operation with people's movements will definitely require proper discernment on the part of the Indian church because there are movements whose causes and strategies are contrary to the values and principles that it upholds. For example, there are Naxalite movements which resort to violence as a normal course of action. There are also very vocal movements of gay rights activists who work for the recognition and protection of homosexual *lifestyle* in society. The presence of such movements and causes makes discernment acutely necessary. Even with them at cautious dialogical interactions may bear some fruit.

7. Conclusion

Social advocacy and social action of Christians stand in continuity with the mission of Jesus (cf. Lk 4:16-21). We may look at people's movements as instruments in the Spirit's work of transforming the world. It should be possible for the church, with its ample resources in terms of both personnel and material, to engage, after due discernment, with people's movements in order to create a more humane, benevolent and equitable society that safeguards the dignity and rights of all citizens, especially the more vulnerable. I conclude with the inspiring thought of Pope Francis: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 49).

Vidyajyoti College

New Delhi

mangaisj@gmail.com

Participatory Democracy and Emancipation of the Subalterns

A. Maria Arul Raja

The author clearly illustrates that in spite of all legal provisions and policies still the subalterns are not integrated into the main stream of Indian society. The basic reason is that they have no access to quality education and they have no participation in the process of decision making which affects their own life and future. He proposes that the Church should provide them critical education and become a catalyst for democratic and cultural movements in favor of the marginalized. The author, Maria Arul Raja SJ is a specialist in Subaltern Studies and he teaches theology at Arul Kadal Theology Centre, Chennai.

Bundle of Contradictions

Despite high voltage social conflicts, Indian democratic systems seem to function rather with regular rhythm. Even while touching upon 9.5 percent growth, Indian human development went down to 128th place at the global level. In spite of the constitutional laws with comprehensive provisions and impressive amendments, the unwritten social norms are violently promulgated through social practices. The progressive policies emerging from the precincts of the legislative bodies seemed to have failed its citizens for want of political will of implementing them. India is proud of its secular democratic space. But as an ironic twist of history, those whose governing record is shadowed by questionable moral and political responsibility for the Gujarat pogrom of 2002 have been brought to rule the country after the General Elections-2014. The campaigns conducted during this election with the idioms of Hindu cultural nationalism

and Hindu sacred geography are quite incompatible with the public space in the democratic and secular India.¹ In short India is a bundle of contradictions.²

Even after 67 years of independence of India, the disempowered voice of the women of India and especially the women of the former untouchables and the sons and daughters of Adivasis and the Tribals is not yet heard from the civil society. They have not yet been fully integrated into the mainstream of Indian society. The acquisition of social capital of self-governance with self-confidence seeking to promote social equity and social justice has become well-nigh an impossible dream for the impoverished subalterns. In fact, the representative democracy in India could be said to have failed and betrayed them miserably.³ The following cases illustrate the denial of legitimate space in the context of the human rights of the subalterns:

Case 1: The non-Dalits refuse to co-operate with the elected Panchayat presidents and ward members from among the Dalits. They continue to humiliate them with the “tacit approval” of the so-called ‘upper caste’ government officials and police forces. The manipulatively forced resignation of two Dalit panchayat presidents in Tamil Nadu immediately after their election highlights the failure of the state to stop attempts aimed at preventing the empowerment of Dalits. The most cruel expression of caste-Hindu intolerance was witnessed in the massacre of Murugesan, president of the Melavalavu village panchayat in Madurai district, and five other Dalits on June 29, 1997.⁴

Case 2: One finds “that neither the reservation for women or their actual presence in the Panchyat have become any more sensitive to the

¹ “Preserve the Idea of India”, Editorial, *The Hindu*- Chennai Edition (May 17, 2014).

² Cf. Ganapathy Palanithurai and Varadarajan Ragupathy, *Communities Panchayats and Governance at Grassroots*, (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2008).

³ The ‘tokenism’ of representation by the so-called Dalit or Tribal leaders such as Jegajivan Ram, Meera Kumar, Sushil Kumar Shinde, Bangaru Lakshman, Ram Vilas Paswan, Mayawathi, Jitan Ram Manjhi, Udhit Raj, Thirumavalavan, Krishnasamy, Shibu Soren or Babulal Marandi has not contributed to the genuine empowerment of the subaltern people at the grass-root levels.

⁴ Cf. S. Vishwanathan, “A Setback to Empowerment”, *Frontline*, Vol. 19/10 (May 11-24), 2002.

problems related to the village women. The women who are elected are not always treated with due respect. Many elected women complained that their suggestions were not considered seriously nor were they consulted while decisions were being made. Some felt that their views were ignored only because they are women. At times they were pressurized by their husbands to approve their decisions made by the male dominated Panchayats”.⁵

Case 3: On the 1000th day of its on-going struggle, the anti-Kudan Kulam Nuclear Power Project (anti-KKNPP) has taken the decision with the following effect: “Terming “undemocratic and anti-people” the Supreme Court’s verdict dismissing a petition filed against the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project, the People’s Movement Against Nuclear Energy (PMANE) has said the protest against the project would be intensified.”⁶

Case 4: The women, young or old, especially from the Dalit-Bahujan sectors have been gang-raped by the police officials inside or outside the police station. Then they are hanged, dead or alive, half-naked on the tress in public places. Without any sense of remorse or responsibility, the representatives of the executive (the police officials) and of the legislature (Members of the Assembly or Members of the Parliament) come out with exhortative statements that rapes, after all, as routine events need not be taken so very drastically.⁷

Narrow Elitism in Governance and Civil Society

The system of Panchayati Raj has been envisaged to establish a participatory democracy through the structure of the Gram Sabha wherein

⁵ Shashi Kaul and Shradha Sahni, “Study on the Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institution”, Studies on Home and Community Science, 3/1(2009), p. 29.

⁶ P. Sudhakar, “PMANE Vows to Intensify Agitation”, *The Hindu* (Madurai Edition), May 9, 2014.

⁷ Cf. “Badaun Rape Case: Postmortem Report Confirms Rape of Both Sisters, Defies UP DGP’s Claim”, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Badaun-rape-case-Postmortem-report-confirms-rape-of-both-sisters-defies-UP-DGPs-claim/articleshow/36338609.cms> dated June 10, 2014. Also cf. “Rape are Routine, says UP DGP”, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/rapes-are-routine-says-up-dgp/> dated June 12, 2014. Also cf. “Indian Police ‘Gang-Rape Woman After She Fails to Pay Bribe’”, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/12/indian-police-gang-rape-uttar-pradesh> dated June 12, 2014.

all people participate in the Gram Panchayat in planning and implementing various programmes for economic development and social justice. Gandhian ideas on Gram Swaraj have always been sustained by the Congress political patronage of the ruling caste-class. But Ambedkar perceptively exposes the so-called village republics as based on the narrow-minded violence of caste-based discrimination of the local dominant communities unleashed against Dalit and women sarpanches.⁸ As against the open confrontation and subtle resistance to it from the feudal, hierarchical, patriarchal and casteist forces of the Indian society, the Panchayat Raj received the constitutional backing with main thrust on reservation to marginalized sections through the 73rd and 74th Amendments. But how to create a congenial atmosphere and cooperation among the people to enable the subalterns to claim their legitimate space?⁹

The elite type of 'civil society' from the so-called middle class- upper caste from the urban milieu in collaboration with the middle class media-world seems to create its own world of ivory tower away from the down-to-earth caste reality defining the destiny of every Indian. This elitism throws the entire blame upon the corrupt politicians and dishonest government officials for the present sad state of affairs. Deliberately oblivious of the atrocities of the caste-ridden polity of the hierarchized society, these middle class members indulge in demonstrations against modern laws and policies formulated for the protection of rights of Dalit-Bahujans.¹⁰ The Dalit political parties believing in the participation in the parliamentary democracy (Bahujan Samajwadi Party [BSP], Viduthalai Chiruthaihal Katchi [VCK], Puthiya Tamizhagam [PT] and others) have made dismal showing in the General Elections- 2014. The candidates of such parties are not seen (or not permitted) to contest in the common

⁸ "However, Ambedkar's views on Gram Swaraj have gained little attention in our intellectual tradition and in civil society activism. As a result Gandhi's unfinished dream of "Ram Rajya" through Gram Swaraj was subsequently institutionalized in the form of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992)." Rahul Sonpimple, "Aam Admi and Dalits", *Countercurrents* (08 February 2014).

⁹ Cf. K. Suman Chandra and V. Annamalai, "Participation of Marginalised Sections in Gram Sabha: Rhetoric and Reality", *Social Change*, Vol. 32/ 1-2 (March- April 2002), pp. 190-199.

¹⁰ Cf. Rahul Sonpimple, "Aam Admi and Dalits", *Countercurrents* (08 February 2014). <http://www.countercurrents.org/rs080214.htm> browsed on May 10, 2014.

(unreserved) Constituencies. It manifests that the Dalits have not been fully integrated into the mainstream of the Indian society.

Favoring the Privileged at the Cost of the Underprivileged

The bureaucratic organs embedded in the ivory-towers of government have set afloat pro-rich schemes with least consideration for the welfare of the impoverished subalterns. The culture of corruption upheld by the vicious spirals of bribery at all levels promote the wrongheaded economic policies like the facilitation of foreign direct investment driving the citizens to the streets away from their own lands of agriculture. The subaltern struggle for equal footing with others in claiming legitimate opportunities cannot be undertaken in isolation from all other issues of people. The serious issues like misuse or underuse or lapse of the funds for the welfare schemes for the SCs and STs by both state and central government, vacant posts of SC/ST quotas in government intuitions, one caste group monopoly on small and big business, caste group holdings of top level decision making administrative posts in the government departments, unequal pattern of land holding according to caste and frequent occurrences of human rights violations against the SCs and the STs are simple taken for granted as the order of the day.

The mere slogan of development is directionless with the hidden agenda of empowering a handful of billionaires like Ambanis or Mittals with private planes and palatial edifices. The need of the hour is the actual social development having the sense of empowering the hungry and homeless through the active participation of the majority of the citizens rendered voiceless and unrepresented so far.¹¹ Here the disadvantaged people (quite often the victims of the so-called development) who have been historically and culturally repressed even through the so-called democratic process¹² are deliberately placed at the centre stage as the

¹¹ Meghnad Desai, "The Hindu rate of Backwardness", *The Indian Express*, July 28, 2013 (cf. <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/the-hindu-rate-of-backwardness/1147631/>). "The Indian State can deliver a nuclear bomb and launch satellites but not universal primary education and decent public health. This is not an accident. It is a choice made by the elite who have been in power for 60 years and reflects their values."

¹² Vibhuti Agarwal, "Cash-for-Votes in Tamil, Nadu Polls", "Luring voters with cash, alcohol and other goodies to get their support has long been commonplace in Indian elections." *The Wall Street Journal* <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2014/05/09/cash-for-votes-in-tamil-nadu-polls/> browsed on June 10, 2014.

decision-making subjects for fixing up the national preferences, policies and projects. “The investment priorities of the successive Five Years Plans under Nehru and his successors were enormously biased in favour of upper castes. A nexus of brahmanic-feudal-bureaucratic influence reinforced the hold of the traditional power structure through manipulations of the newly introduced participatory democracy.”¹³

That is why the private interests have been largely served by the public sectors. The state-funded universities and centres of higher learning like Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) or Indian Institute of Management (IIM) have been deployed in empowering the elites in the name of promoting meritocracy at the cost of serving the marginalized sectors of the people. The need of the hour is not the business-oriented and industry-centred aggressive democracy but the poor-oriented and the subaltern-centred gentle democracy ensuring an all-inclusive development leading to the promotion of the rights of the least and the last.

Need of Critical Vision and Imagination from Below

“The tragedy of India is, despite all the changes, the upper-caste elites remain the norm-setting groups (by virtue of being highly educated, highly manipulative, highly rewarded) and the majority of Indians—dalit-adivasis, OBCs and Muslims—still face many kinds of overt or covert deprivation, disadvantage and exclusion. Reservations, subsidies, grants, cultural tokenism, and the rhetoric of democracy and justice notwithstanding, the basic economics and politics of caste remain intact.”¹⁴ Despite the thundering claims and cliches of the Indian IT revolution in a globalized context, the fundamental hierarchized structural grip of the caste system has not changed in the democratic politics. Even amidst the perennial struggles of the Dalit- Bahujan people against the systematic violence imposed on them by the atrocious caste hierarchy, they as a unified

¹³ Braj Ranjan Mani, “The Crisis And Challenge Of Dalit-Bahujans”, Cf. <http://www.countercurrents.org/mani171213.htm> dated December 17, 2013 browsed on June 10, 2014.

¹⁴ Braj Ranjan Mani, “The Crisis And Challenge Of Dalit-Bahujans”, Cf. <http://www.countercurrents.org/mani171213.htm> dated December 17, 2013 browsed on June 10, 2014. Also cf. Braj Ranjan Mani, *Knowledge and Power: A Discourse for Transformation*. (New Delhi: Manohar, 2013).

people could not evolve a unified vision for becoming co-humans with equal footing with others.¹⁵

The Congress brand of multiculturalism seems to have the brahminic core of caste culture in practice. The Hindutva brand of cultural nationalism valorizes the pretended unity of the 'native' majority of religionists set against the 'alien' Muslims and Christians systematically demonized.¹⁶ Another less powerful politico-ideological groupings confined to small pockets, regions, and states (regional parties and fragmented leftists)¹⁷ seem to operate with the orientations of decentralization of powers and federal structure of governance. But in practice they represent various ethnicities, languages and subcultures. Political parties claiming to forge ahead with the subaltern agenda (Dalit/ Adivasi/ Other Backward Castes)¹⁸ seem to have been submerged in the culture of vying with each other for gaining some 'beggarly crumbs falling from the national tables' by sacrificing their original ideological positions. With such bargains and compromises, both the national and regional parties do not have the political will for allotting appropriate time, money or energy for addressing the genuine needs of the entire Dalit-Bahujans and Adivasis who have been kept in traditional subjugation. Such subalterns do not yet have the competing national vision for projecting their agenda of empowerment. The emancipatory and egalitarian vision of Phule, Ambedkar, and Periyar for creating a casteless society has been conveniently forgotten. "Resistance from below represented by the likes of Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar - through

¹⁵ Cf. Perry Anderson, *The Indian Ideology*, (London: Verso Books, 2012).

¹⁶ Cf. Braj Ranjan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005).

¹⁷ The leftists have been defeated into almost total oblivion in the recent General Election-2014. The call for boycotting the polls by the radical leftist (Marxist-Leninist) groups seemed to have been ignored by a large number of people.

¹⁸ The Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK), Paattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), Viduthalai Chiruthihaal Katchi (VCK), Puthiya Thamilagam (PMK) and so forth are some of such political parties.

war of positions and movements against the upper castes as the primary source of injustice and exploitation - could not evolve into a revolution or counter-hegemony.”¹⁹ In short, the Dalit- Bahujans- Adivasis have been betrayed in the name of the seductive myths on nation-building, robust development, liberal economy, or IT revolution leading us to become super power.

Systematic denial of critical education to the marginalized majority is the root-cause for dampening the assertive spirit of the subalterns. They have been kept illiterate under subjugation with cumulative dominance. Their innate capacities to produce and disseminate the down-to-earth knowledge have been scoffed at by the modern-day educationists manufacturing thousands of ‘living robots’ fiddling with computer keyboards. Even with the existing paralysis of the Dalit-Adivasi imagination for creating casteless and classless society, they need to be inspired to rereading history for constructing new history from below.

Appropriate Intervention by the Church

“For Christians, the vision of the Reign of God opens up a large horizon of public theology with immense possibility to dialogue and interact with all segments of the people on issues and questions that touch every one-issues of human life and society, and issues of the world and nature”.²⁰ In the same spirit the All India Christian Council expresses its expectation after the General Election-2014 as follows: “We respect democracy and the voice of the people. We accept the results with grace and with optimism even. We will have to find out how we can tell the new government of our problems and our fears, and our expectations of a strong secularism, and hold it accountable for its misdeeds whenever it falters in giving us our security and our freedom of faith”.²¹

With the spirit of undertaking appropriate intervention on behalf of the

¹⁹ Braj Ranjan Mani, “The Crisis and Challenge of Dalit- Bahujans”, *Counter Currents*, December 17, 2013. Cf. <http://www.countercurrents.org/mani171213.htm> browsed on March 25, 2014.

²⁰ Felix Wilfred, *Theology to go Public*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2013.

²¹ Cf. John Dayal, “India’s Religious Minorities Wary in Wake of Modi’s Landslide Win”, <http://www.ucanindia.in/news/indias-religious-minorities-wary-in-wake-of-modis-landslide-win/24938/daily> browsed on June 01, 2014.

subaltern people, the following could be spelt out as the possible areas of involvement of the Church and all the people of good will across the country:

- The Church could engage herself with people's movements for promoting liberties and rights for the society embracing diversity and secularism. The elected representatives are to be pressurized to influence the policy-making for organizing the landless labourers, marginal peasants, fisherfolk, and all other unorganized labourers. Whenever their security for their lives and livelihood are at stake, then she could create platforms for enabling the civil rights activists to organize the collective voice of the victims to be proclaimed both at the national and international fora.
- The struggle for democracy, accountable state, defence of Constitutional liberties, communal harmony, pluralism and defence of secular values, social justice, economic justice, environmental justice, gender justice and equality are to be supported. Whenever women, Dalits, Adivasis, workers, landless agricultural labourers, fisher folk, marginal and small peasants and religious minorities are likely to face further marginalization, dispossession and violence, the Church has to immediately enter into the fray to speak out on their behalf.
- All these struggles of resisting marginalization and promoting justice have to be undertaken through engagement with criminal justice system. Such attempts entail easily accessible networks of legal aid clinics, para legal workers and awareness among the community about their democratic and Constitutional rights. The Right to Information Act (RTA) could be elaborately accessed in order to obtain information from various government offices especially on the stories of denials and discriminations against the subalterns. This forces the government machineries to practice transparent transactions.
- Systematic and meticulous documentation of discrimination and marginalization is the need of the hour at all levels. It has to be extended to record the hate propaganda and the processes of

building prejudices against the marginalized people across the country. sections of the society. With all these back up, the institution of Judiciary which is supposed to function as the watch dog of the Constitutional guarantees of liberties, has to be sensitized to the actual powerlessness of the vulnerable masses of the subalterns. This could help it to transcend the habitual ways of delaying justice in favour of the influential elite with their money and muscle powers.

- The Church with her ministry of reconciliation could apply herself to undo the prejudices between the SCs and BCs and the animosities between religions, and the hostilities against Dalits/ Adivasis/ Women. The infra-structural facilities like social media and educational institutions, and the occasions like pilgrimages, feast days, novena devotions, inter-religious dialogue could be creatively used for building bridges between fragmented sectors of people.
- The Church cannot afford to be silent when the Dalits are targeted, Adivasis attacked, Muslims are haunted and the women are raped. When the Christians are hunted down there may not be any voice in the wilderness to support the victims. Going beyond this reciprocal solidarity (helping someone for having received help), the Church has to be awakened to the divine call for protecting the human rights of the disowned, exiled, excluded, orphaned, widowed, and impoverished both from the First Testament and the Second Testament. The 'minority complex' should not become an excuse for justifying one's narrow pietism or convenient escapism. International and national levels of solidarity networks are quite crucial for promoting human rights regarding gender, environmental, social and economic justice.
- The Church could take up the role of catalyst for democratic cultural movements for generating creative culture-specific and people-friendly symbols for celebrating the significance of liberty, diversity, egalitarianism, justice, solidarity, compassion and human dignity. This could counter the anti-people orientations of slavery, homogenization, hierarchy, injustice, fragmentation, hatred, and

exploitation. In short all age-old feudal symbols upholding all forms of birth-based hierarchies (caste, gender, colour, linguistic, communal or regional) have to be demolished.

- The Dalit Christians have been very much disappointed over the denial of their Scheduled Caste rights for nearly seven decades in the Indian soil. Both the UPA and NDA governments have not come forward to undo the damage done so far for the Dalit Christians. Such sad states of affairs prevail in spite of a series of non-violent struggles for peacefully representing their legitimate woes to the corridors of power. “All these actions and struggles for promoting Human Rights are none but our efforts to undo the caste discrimination and to endorse the values of liberty, equality, fraternity and secularism as enshrined in the Indian Constitution. These struggles for justice are based on the values of the Gospel. And hence, all of us as a community should join hands with these struggles of Dalit Christians for justice. No one can afford to disown this problem as if it is not ours.”²²
- The following contents have to be incorporated in the formation - education programmes of the Church at all levels: catechesis, religious training, seminary formation, laity formation, liturgical formation, theological formation and ongoing formation have to be revamped from the perspectives of the subaltern sensibilities. Some dimensions that need to find a place in these trainings are:²³ Basic and advanced familiarity with the Indian Constitution, Basic Legal and Human Rights Education, Familiarity with native resources like Dhamma Pada, Granth Sahib, Quran, Ambedkar, Ramabai, Periyar, Ayyankali, Kabir Das, Ayodhidas Pandithar, Mahatma Phule, Savitribai Phule, Narayana Guru, Meenakshi Moon and others, Dalit women’s concerns and challenges and

²² Tamil Nadu Bishops’ Council, Lenten Circular-2010, Translated by A. Maria Arul Raja

²³ Recommendations of the CBCI - SC/ST- Seminar [“Building Inclusive Communities Through Dalit Empowerment”] at NBCLC, Bangalore, March 6-8, 2009).

Dalit movements, Skill and capacity building training to handle conflict situation and to face the challenges of life and livelihood.

Reign of God in Indian Context Here and Now

The Reign of God has its unique dynamics of accomplishing salvation to all through the salvation of the least. In the Indian context it could be experienced when the process of annihilation of casteism is sustained with promotion of the dignity of the dehumanized Dalits, Adivasis and their women and children. When their security and identity are endangered with wrong policies and projects of the profit-oriented ruling elite with hierarchical mind-set and anti-people governance, then what is to be emphatically insisted is justice for them in all spheres of human relationships and activities (the economic, the social, the political, the cultural and the religious). This could be achieved only by way of activating the assertive spirit emerging from deep within of the wounded consciousness of the subaltern people with affirmative actions promoting their human rights. This has to be undertaken with the spirit of dialogue and reconciliation with all people of good will. The Church could be an active partner with the civil society in enabling the subalterns to claim their legitimate share in the participatory democracy.

Arul Kadal Theology Centre
136 San Thome High Road,
Chennai-600028
amarajasj@gmail.com

Interreligious Relations in Civil Society

Sebastian Painadath

In today's new pluralistic context no religion can declare itself as the absolute religion. The author shows that though religions are diverse, the underlying spirituality is one, which can be perceived only in mystical experience. All believers are co-pilgrims and in meeting together each one has to share his/her experience and enrich the other. All religions have to play a prophetic and inspirational role in civil society. The author Sebastian Painadath SJ is an internationally well-known scholar in the study of religion and interreligious dialogue. At present he resides at Sameeksha Theological College, Kalady, Kerala.

The whole world is shrinking to a global village. The intercontinental travel facilities, the international forums of collaboration and the media of communication bring people together beyond all national and regional boundaries. What happens at this moment in a far off corner of the world is presented before our eyes within a few minutes. One can directly communicate with anyone, from any distance, at any time. The world is shrinking to a global village in which everyone seems to know everyone else. This has given rise to a new culture of globalization at the dawn of the third millennium.

This new culture has a lot of positive aspects and several negative impacts as well. On the one hand people are brought closer to one another; on the other hand an increasing sense of being uprooted and lonely oppresses individuals and communities. Economic growth makes fast strides, however the poor become poorer and increasingly exploited. Science discovers the mysteries of matter, still a deep-rooted fear and

anxiety eat up the psychic marrow of individuals. Medical science discovers new methods of treatment, but the types of diseases are on the increase. Psychology comes up with effective methods of knowing oneself and others, yet persons experience a growing inability for lasting human relations. The internet opens up a fantastic world of knowledge and entertainment, yet one is confronted with confusion and frustration.

A personal search for meaning is much more articulate today than ever before. In foregone days religious authorities and intellectuals claimed to have the unquestionable power to teach on the meaning of life and reality. Today people are getting intellectually critical and spiritually alert. They ask questions for which the traditional stances are no answers. This has brought much of the religious establishment into a crisis of relevance. In many places – especially in Asia – religious authorities try to keep the folk under their control through elaborate rituals and stringent regulations; often this provokes religious fundamentalism and becomes a threat to civic peace. In many other places – especially in the West – religion is pushed to the periphery of civil society and a god-less hedonistic culture tends to determine the life-style.

Towards a Culture of Dialogue

On this background the question on the meaning of religion and the significance of inter-religious dialogue is being raised with a renewed vigour. Religion meaning *re-connecting* (*religare*) implies the reconnecting not only to God but also to the true self within, to humans outside as well as to the eco-system. Hence the meaning of religion is being explored from theological, psychological, sociological and ecological perspectives. An interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon of religion is the *novum* of the modern times. Religion has become a topic for scientific research and study in academic circles. Inter-religious dialogue is basically an exploration through (*dia*) the Logos vibrating in religions. The divine self-articulation, the divine Word (*Logos*), pulsates in all religions, in their scriptures and symbols. Through dialogue an exploration is attempted into the deeper dimensions of the universal presence of the Logos. In this process the unique significance as well as the limitation of each religion comes to light. In the last hundred years of inter-religious encounter at various levels most religions have come to a critical self-reflection on their religious heritage. This has led to a paradigm shift on

the global landscape of inter-religious dialogue. Today religions meet one another with a genuine openness to the mystery of the Divine and with an ardent concern for civic peace. The resurgence of religious fundamentalism with political manipulation is a nervous reaction to this culture of openness.

For centuries religions domesticated the creative search of humans, and religious authorities censured the freedom of the spirit. Religious discipline imposed from above in the name of God kept vast masses under control. Unity through uniformity was projected as the highest value. Most of the *forms* imposed on people came from the elite circles. The classicist paradigm of the perception of truth was the norm: what the intellectuals discover as truth is valid for all! This led to the hegemony of faith over reason, of theology over philosophy, of religious authority over secular government. This phenomenon was conspicuous in the Brahmanism of Hinduism, in the monastic Dhamma system of Buddhism, in the priestly hierarchy of Christianity, in the messianic movements of Judaism, in the Ulama of Islam and in the Guru role of Sikhism. The European Enlightenment was a protest against this, upholding reason over faith, logic over the mystique, historicity over mythical world-view. With the subsequent spread of democratic principles, the independence of colonies, scientific discoveries and global means of communication a new age of freedom dawned. It meant not only freedom to think and express oneself, but also freedom from oppressive religious beliefs and restrictive religious powers. The historical and evolutive dimension of the perception of truth came to be recognized as a basic dynamic of epistemology. This was already implicit in the classical axiom: *quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur* (whatever is perceived, is perceived according to the modality of the perceiver). The *subjective* element with all its conditioning factors is being emphasized much in the post-modern paradigms. Instead of an uncompromising quest for universal truths the differences were acknowledged and the diversities came to be respected. *Vive la difference!*

On the religious landscape this meant the acknowledgement of the limitation of the perception and articulation of truth related to the ultimate reality, to the Divine. There is no last word on the Divine, which always eludes human perception; there is no *one* name of the Divine, which

always remains beyond names and forms. Hence no religion can declare itself as the absolute religion, the only way to salvation. Every religion is a fragmentary perception of the ineffable mystery of divine-human relationship. Every religion tries to articulate the ongoing divine-human dialogue which forms the inherent spiritual dynamic of human history. A religion may be experienced as *the* way, the *only* way to integral liberation by those who follow that religion; but it cannot be demanded that all seekers should inevitably follow that religion. This does not mean the relativisation of religion, but the need to examine each religion in the proper relationality. Religions are phenomena conditioned by time (history) and space (culture), and hence each religion has to be studied in relation to the historical and cultural factors which shaped it. Through a scientific study of religion and through inter-religious dialogue the conditioning factors of each religion are perceived with all their limitations, and the universal liberative message of every religion is respectfully recognized as well. All religions must collaborate in the civic space in this process of study, dialogue and joint-projects for the common humanity.

Spirituality and Religion

In order to understand this process it may be good to reflect on the dialectics between spirituality and religion. Spirituality literally means the experience of the Spirit. Spirituality is the experience of being gripped by the aspect of the ultimate concern. Spirituality is awakening to the dimension of self-transcendence. The *existential* awareness of the finitude as finitude is a pointer to the *essential* orientation to the Infinite. Spirituality is this structural awareness that dawns in the human intellect (*buddhi / nous*). It connotes the state of being grasped by the sense of the Sacred, of being rooted in the Ground of being, of being graced by the Divine. Spirituality is the awe-inspiring as well as fascinating (*tremendum et fascinosum*) awareness of the all-pervading and all-transcending mystery of reality. This means the deep awareness of oneself, of the cosmos and of the Divine - all ultimately in One.

In this sense spirituality is a universal experience. Every person has some element of spirituality. No one would be able to say: I do not need any ultimate meaning in my life. Spirituality is that which takes a person beyond the small concerns of daily life to the ultimate concern, that

which renders a perennial meaning to life and work. Spirituality is the all-embracing vision-and-way of life. It nourishes the life process with ethical values and binds the hearts of persons in social concern. Spirituality is the core of social bonding and the heart-beat of civic peace.

Religion is an articulation of spirituality. The universal experience of spirituality finds concrete expressions in particular religions. The unitive consciousness of the divine Spirit unfolds itself in and through the diversity of religions. The underlying sense of the mystery of reality is expressed through the concrete forms of religions. Symbol is the medium through which spirituality finds concrete expression on the religious landscape. "Symbols identify, assimilate and unify diverse levels and realities that are to all appearances incompatible." (Mircea Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (London, Sheed and Ward, 1958, p.455) A symbol is that which brings together (*syn-ballein*) and integrates diverse elements.

There are basically four areas of symbolisation on the religious landscape: creed, cult, code and community. These are like the four pillars of the religious edifice. Every religion has all these four elements of symbolic representation. These symbolic elements are supplied either from the cultural milieu outside or from the psychic fabric inside. Religious symbols evolve out of this twofold formative process. This gives rise to a rich variety of religions, and diversities within every religion itself. The cultural conditioning and psychic formation of religion give rise to several ambiguities on the landscape of religions. Though spirituality emerges out of the pure well-springs of the Spirit, religions as they flow down like rivers collect a lot of sediments of culture, e.g. political concerns, economic interests, power struggles and expansionist ambitions. In every religion there is a constant struggle between the divine Spirit and these factors of estrangement. The power and presence of the divine Spirit is articulated through mystics and prophets in every religion.

What then is the dialectics between spirituality and religion?

Spirituality is the core of religions, religion is the form of spirituality.

Spirituality is the content of religion, religion is the language of spirituality.

Spirituality is a universal experience, religion is a particular perception.

Spirituality is the exploration of the Ultimate, religion is exposure to the concrete.

Spirituality is the pole of the underlying unity of reality, religion is the point of diversification of forms.

Spirituality wakes up in the intuitive intellect (*nous/buddhi*), religion evolves in the analytical mind.

Spirituality is like the root dimension, religions evolve like branches which grow in different directions.

The unity at the depth of spirituality has to be recognized, and the diversity at the level of religions has to be respected. This is the emerging new paradigm of inter-religious harmony (S.Painadath SJ, *Spiritual Co-Pilgrims*, Claretian Publications, Quezon City, Manila, 2014).

Harmony of Religions

Harmony is not a naïve assertion of unity, but the discovery of converging lines at the depth of spirituality. Harmony is not the denial of diversity either, but the acceptance of it as a rich heritage of human evolution. Diversity is beauty – this is what we experience in nature. No two trees are exactly alike. On every single tree there is a rich diversity: no two leaves are exactly the same. No two mountains are of the same shape, no two rivers flow in the same way. Diversity is the secret of the beauty of divine creativity in nature.

Diversity is beauty in human creativity too. There are so many languages, customs, styles of art and forms of dance; there is a rich diversity in philosophical reflections, scientific explorations and political ideologies. Together with these one could assess the diversity of religions too. The fact that there are many religions can be taken as the richness of human search and as a gift of divine grace too. As long as the Divine remains an incomprehensible mystery, as long as human search continues to be a relentless process, as long as human creativity explores infinite horizons, diversity of religions will nourish the spiritual evolution of humanity. “We accept the great religious traditions of our people as significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of

salvation. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors. God has drawn our people to Himself through them. They have shaped our history, and our way of thinking. For us in Asia they have been the doorway to God" (FABC, Statement of the First Plenary Assembly, 1974). Harmony of religions is the creative process of realizing the unity in spirituality while respecting the diversity of religions, and upholding the plurality of religions while exploring the underlying unity in spirituality. A few examples may clarify this concern:

Take the case of a musical concert. There are so many musical instruments at play. Each instrument has its own sound and rhythm. But in the process of the concert there is a beautiful symphony. The sound of each instrument merges into that of the others, without however losing its identity or disturbing the others. Before the concert starts, the musicians sit and tune the instruments. This is the process towards *harmony*. But in this process the violin does not become the sitar, a tabala does not turn out to be a drum and the flute does not cease to be what it is. Each instrument has a unique contribution to make to the process of symphony. One does not lose one's identity in the other; one does not go against the other; one alone does not make the concert either. Symphony is not a static reality, rather it is a dynamic creativity. Harmony is not something that already exists, rather it is an evolving process.

Look at a tree. No two leaves are alike, no two branches grow in exactly the same direction. There is a tremendous diversity on the tree. Yet the whole tree is one. From the root to the top the tree is one. The inherent flow of the one vital sap keeps the tree in its live diversity and preserves the tree in its biological unity. The sap does not do away with diversity, on the contrary the vital flow nourishes the diversity of colours and shapes, and enables the emergence of flowers and fruits. In this process each branch, each leaf, preserves its identity. Each one has a unique contribution to make to the wellbeing of the entire tree. One leaf does not just become another leaf; one branch would not tell the other branch, you have no place here. All branches grow together. Whatever is created through photosynthesis on each leaf is shared with all other leaves. Tree is not a static reality, as it may appear to be. There is an enormous dynamism within the fabric of the tree. The tree changes itself at every moment; yet the tree continues to be one living reality.

The tree is an embodiment of colourful diversity evolving out of an organic unity. In this sense tree is a powerful symbol of harmony. Harmony is not what already exists; it is a becoming, an event of life.

And our body! There is marvelous diversity in the human body, yet the entire body is one. The body is made up of so many limbs and organs. One organ does not become another one. The significance of one cannot be replaced by another one. The eye cannot do the function of the heart, nor can the brain do the work of the kidney. Each organ has its own function for the wellbeing of the body. There is a vital force that unites all the organs and integrates the functions of all cells. The cosmic stream of *prana* energy percolates through all the organs and sustains the entire body in its smooth functioning. The spiritual dimension of the soul is the life principle in the body. The entire body is just one living organism. When something happens to one part of the body all the other parts are alerted. Health consists in the harmonious functioning of all the limbs and organs in the body. At every moment we live out this harmony. The harmony between unity and diversity is a reality that we experience constantly in our bodily existence.

A fourth example is that of dance. In the process of a classical dance so many bodily gestures and facial expressions evoke an aesthetic experience of harmony. Each *mudra* has its significance, every step has its meaning. They do not fall apart, but form a beautiful stream of communicating the aesthetic experience. In the process the dancer and the dance merge into a dynamic unity. Dance evolves as the *ek-sistence* of the dancer. The being of the dancer is a becoming. There is a harmony between the diversity in the forms of expression (*rupa*) and unity in the aesthetic experience (*bhava*). In a sense the entire cosmos is a single dance harmonising the tremendous diversity in deep oneness. Even the inherent presence of the Divine could be described as dance. In the Hindu perception Siva is the dance-form of the gracious divine presence. In Christian theology the Trinitarian dimension of the Divine is described as dance (*peri-choresis* = dancing together). Describing the divine life as dance would mean that there is a constant movement within the Divine. Harmony is what evolves through movement.

Diversity of Religions

Respect for the diversity of religions and recognition of the unity in spirituality are the two dialectical poles of a culture of harmony. What could be the theological justification for this paradigm?

The diversity of religions is caused by two basic factors: the freedom of the Divine in self-manifestation and the creativity of the human in exploring the Divine. "Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man" (John Paul II, Red. Miss. 29).

Since the Divine is an absolute mystery, no particular symbol or revelatory event can fully exhaust the divine self-manifestation. The finite as finite cannot comprehend the Infinite! Every name or symbol of the Divine is a fragmentary perception of the unfathomably divine mystery. Every holy scripture is a language of divine self-revelation within the conditions of human culture and language. From the very beginning of humanity God has been revealing the God-self *in diverse ways*. The divine Logos vibrates in the Holy Books of religions; the divine Spirit pulsates in the symbols of religions. The divine grace is operative in the rituals of religions. The entire history of humanity is the evolution of the Divine-human encounter in diverse intensities. We Christians have experienced the entry of the Divine into the human in a unique way in Jesus the Christ. Christ is the *light* in which we recognize the divine presence in the historical process. Christ is the *way* through which we have access to the divine process of self-manifestation. Christ is the *truth* by which we recognize the other manifestations of divine Truth. Our faith in Christ is in no way a judgement on divine revelation in other religions. The prophets, sages, saints and spiritual masters of world religions are bearers of the divine Logos into human hearts. The scriptures and symbols, rituals and prayers of religions communicate to believers the saving path of the Divine. "We should have a deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows, where it wills" (John Paul II, Red. Miss. 56).

The diversity of religions is also caused by the vast horizons of human creativity. The human spirit is free to search the Divine, because there is

a structural orientation towards the *Beyond*. The finite is created with a structural openness to the Infinite. The human person is endowed with freedom in responding to the divine call. Hence there is a rich diversity in the ways in which humans perceive the Divine and respond to the divine inspirations. If human creativity supported by freedom is a gift impregnated by the divine creator, the scope for the manifold ways of perceiving the Divine has to be respected. Consequently the diversity of religions is richness of human culture.

Unity in Spirituality

There is the second pole of the unity in spirituality. This is grounded on two factors: the ONEness of the Divine and the unity of humanity. There are not several gods. There is no Christian God parallel to the Islamic God or Hindu God. The divine reality is ONE: it is a dynamic *unum*, not a static *unus*. Within this *oneness* there is a tremendous dynamism. This is the basic perception of all great spiritual traditions. When Buddhism describes it as *sunya*, it does not mean emptiness in a static sense, but fullness in the dynamic sense; the ultimate reality is *aûnya*, which means vibration, movement, dynamism (*swi*=to expand, to move). When Hinduism speaks of it as *Brahman*, it means divine dynamism (*brh*= to grow, expand), or as *Atman* it means again movement (*an*= to breathe, to blow). Christianity describes the Divine as Spirit, which denotes life-movement within the Divine. (*ruach* /*pneuma* / *spiritus* = breath). When Jesus invites us to “worship God in Spirit and Truth”, he invites us to resonate with an utter openness (*alletheia*, truth = openness) to the divine Spirit (divine breath). The Christian symbol of the Divine as Trinity is another indication that God has to be perceived in a three-fold relationship, in a constant process of *perichoresis*, ie. in a creative movement (*chorein* = to dance). The Jewish understanding of the Divine as *YHWH* points to the dynamic presence of God in the life and destiny of the people (*shekina*). The Islamic name *Al-lahu* also refers to the all-embracing and all transcending presence of the One God. No religion speaks of the Ultimate reality as a static self-identity, but as a dynamic self-unfolding reality. The Divine is like a fountain within us, the source of Light and Love, Life and Grace. Whatever be the name or symbol used by religious traditions to address it, the mystical insight is that of the presence of the divine dynamism. In this all religions meet in depth.

The basic unity of humanity is also the ground of the unity in spirituality. All human persons across the centuries, beyond all distinctions of heritage, colour, ethnicity and religion are equal as human persons. Every person is endowed with inviolable dignity and undeniable freedom and vibrant creativity. Every person has to be respected for what she / he is. Every person has a responsibility towards social process and civic peace. All humans together form one global family. Today the sense of this global bonding has become very clear and demanding. More than ever before the scope of inter-cultural communication has developed thanks to the media and international cooperation. This has consequences in global spirituality too. In spite of the differences in religious symbol and theological languages the awareness of the deep spiritual unity grows in people. When Hindus or Christians or Muslims pray, all pray in fact to the one God; when they speak of the salvific presence of the Divine, they all mean the one and same divine reality. The perceptions of the Divine take different names and forms, but the reality is One. The spirituality that unfolds in the structural orientation to self-transcendence is one. The perception of this underlying unity in spirituality is a mystical perception. Mysticism is the awareness of the mystery of the Divine. Within this mystery all are one.

We are Co-pilgrims

Respect the diversity of religions and recognize the unity in spirituality – this is the emerging paradigm on the landscape of the encounter of world religions. An image that expresses this paradigm is that *we are co-pilgrims*. With the sisters and brothers of other religions we are co-pilgrims in search of *the height and depth, length and breadth* of the mystery of the divine presence within and around us. Pope John Paul II uses this image often to describe the significance of inter-religious dialogue. “God would like the developing history of humanity to be a pilgrimage in which we *accompany one another* towards the transcendent goal which he sets for us. Either we walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others” (Assisi, 27.10.1986, italics added). “We are all pilgrims on the path of seeking to do God’s will in everything. Let us always be willing to speak to each other, to listen to each other” (Gambia, 23.02.1992). In his visit to India in 1986 and to other Afro-Asian countries he described himself as a

spiritual pilgrim. Pilgrimage is a process and hence it describes the dynamic character of inter-religious encounter. In the pilgrim process the goal may be one, but the routes are different; pilgrims come from diverse quarters and take different routes to the one goal. When they meet they share their experiences with one another, each enlightening the other and being enriched by the other. As spiritual pilgrims we Christians share our Christ-experience with others – this is mission –, and we respectfully listen to the salvific experience of the presence of the divine Spirit in the lives of the co-pilgrims of other religions. In this process of give-and-take we respect the religious otherness of the other and at the same time perceive the unity in the experience of the one divine Spirit in the hearts of all (S.Painadath SJ, *We are Co-pilgrims, Towards a Culture of Inter-religious Harmony*, ISPCK, Delhi, 2012).

With the two World Wars the moral backbone of Europe broke and with that the colonial stances of Western Christianity came to be challenged. The Afro-Asian colonies became independent nations and with this a new self-esteem grew on the landscape of non-Christian religions. In the Catholic Church a new era of dialogue was initiated with Vatican Council II. *Lumen Gentium* makes it clear that people following other religious paths can reach the eternal shores of salvation(16). *Ad Gentes* speaks of the *spiritual treasures God has distributed among peoples* (11). *Gaudium et Spes* mentions the *unseen work of grace* in the hearts of all persons(22). *Dignitatis humanae* declares the freedom of religion as a fundamental right of human persons (2). *Nostra Aetate* invites Catholics to develop a culture of respect and dialogue in relation to other religions(2). During the Council Pope Paul VI declared: “Dialogue is the new way of being the Church” (Eccl. Suam, 63). Pope John Paul II consistently promoted a culture of inter-religious dialogue on a solid theological basis. “Interreligious dialogue at its deepest level is always a dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity” (Rome, 13.11.1992). “By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we open ourselves to God” (Madras, 05.02.1986). Without losing the Christo-centric axis Pope John Paul II explores clear theocentric perspectives and focuses on anthro-po-centric consequences of

a *culture of dialogue* (S. Painadath SJ, *Journeying with Pope John Paul II*, in: *Jeevadhara*, 2013, 408-12).

At the WCC level too an opening can be seen in the attitudes of the mainstream Churches to other religions: "With remorse and humility, with joy and credibility we should deal with believers of other religions. We do find in them a genuine spirituality with commitment, wisdom and compassion, which challenges our attitudes of claiming superiority and being judgmental" (WCC Guidelines for Dialogue, 1977). "We should recognize with respect the working of the Spirit of Christ in the secular and religious events of our times and discern in them the *signs of the times*, so that we can cooperate with the healing work of God" (Mission and Proclamation, WCC, 1982).

With this radically new self-understanding of Christianity and the recognition and appreciation of plurality of religions and the underlying unity in spirituality, the Churches should enter into dialogue with all religions, and all religions should function in civil society as catalyst and prophetic force in transforming the society into a healthy, open, just, free and peaceful community and offer new models of living together. Civil society is today the new space of mission for all religions.

Sameeksha,
Kalady
spainadath@gmail.com

Greening the Oppressed Land: Response of the Church to the Impending Ecological Crisis

Oliver Inchody

The author warns us of the impending ecological catastrophe and proposes attitudinal change and alternative life-style as the remedy. Humankind has to bid farewell to its domination and exploitation culture and take up the stewardship imperative. He scans through some of the teachings of the Church and offers some suggestions. The author Oliver Inchody CMI has a doctorate in Environmental Theology from the Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines and he taught there for some years. At present, he is Professor of Theology at St Charles Lwanga Theological Institute, Windhoek, Namibia.

"Today I offer you a choice of life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life and then you and your descendants will live" [Deuteronomy 30:19-20]. This prophetic text has almost come to its fulfilment today. Humans are in a dilemma of life and death! Assessing to the present ecological situations and its most horrifying state, the Nobel Peace laureate and ecologist, Al Gore, warns the international community saying, "The humanity is having only fifty years more to live in this world." In this crucial situation, one would naturally think, "Is the Church really serious about the problem?" What stand has the Church taken on ecological issues? It is timely to seriously think and reflect about the Church's role in motivating and guiding the faithful and the entire humanity to undo or at least to minimize the effects of the present ecological crisis.

A rich tradition of Episcopal teachings on ecology and human development has been evolved lately over the past three decades. In response to pressing socio-ecological issues, individual bishops or national conferences of bishops have issued pastoral letters on ecology and development.¹ The volume "And God Saw That It Was Good: Catholic Theology and the Environment" published by the United States Catholic Conference in 1996 contains pastoral letters from the bishops of the United States, Australia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Northern Italy and the Philippines. The South African Catholic Bishops' Conference has come up with an awakening call to their faithful, "Our country is affected by the global environmental crisis. We now face the consequences of the economic development of the past which revolved around the exploitation of South African mineral and natural resources, with minimum concern for our peoples and the environment."² The text gives a very strong message that the environment is not only about landscapes and the survival of endangered animals, but it is also about the life of the people, the conditions in which women and men are living, working and recreating. The catholic bishops of the Philippines by quoting from a moving text from the Book of Deuteronomy, urge their people to unite together to act collectively against the ecological degradation that their country is facing:

At this point in the history of our country it is crucial that people motivated by religious faith develop a deep concern for the fragility of our islands' life-systems and take steps to defend the Earth. It is a matter of life and death. We are aware of this threat to life when it comes to nuclear weapons. We know that a nuclear war would turn the whole earth into a fireball and render the planet inhospitable to life. We tend to forget that the constant, cumulative destruction of life-forms and different habitats will, in the long term, have the same effect. Faced with

¹ A rather good collection of the Church's documents are summarized and titled as "The Catholic Church on Ecological Degradation," prepared by Heather R. Wittington. Ref. <http://WWW.faculty.theo.mu.edu/Schaefer.shtml> (accessed on 27 February 2014).

² "Pastoral Letter on Environmental Crisis", South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, 5 September 1999.

these challenges, where the future of life is at stake, Christian men and women are called to take a stand on the side of life.³

Pope Francis on his First General Audience on 05 June 2013, i.e., On the World Environment Day, came up with a strong message to the universal church with regard to what should be the Church's stand on the present ecological issues:

Today we mark World Environment Day, sponsored by the United Nations, which sends a strong reminder of the need to eliminate the waste and disposal of food. When we talk about the environment, about creation, my thoughts turn to the first pages of the Bible, the Book of Genesis, which states that God placed man and woman on earth to cultivate and care for it (cf. 2:15). And the question comes to my mind: What does cultivating and caring for the earth mean? Are we truly cultivating and caring for creation? Or are we exploiting and neglecting it? The verb "to cultivate" reminds me of the care that the farmer has for his land so that it bears fruit, and it is shared: how much attention, passion and dedication! Cultivating and caring for creation is God's indication given to each one of us not only at the beginning of history; it is part of His project; it means nurturing the world with responsibility and transforming it into a garden, a habitable place for everyone.⁴

This is not of the first time that the Church or Popes raise their voice against the escalating nature of the ecological crisis. Ever since the ecological problem has originated, the Church has taken keen interest in all the aspects of its spectrum. As the destruction of the natural world is getting more and more systematic, and the ecological crisis is deepening further and further, as the human beings and the other members of the

³ "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?" Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), Tagaytay, 29 January 1988. The full text of this document is available, <http://www.aenet.org/haribon/bishops.htm> (accessed on 16 April 2004).

⁴ Text taken from Vatican radio web site: http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/06/05/pope_at_audience:_counter_a_culture_of_waste_with_solidarity/en1-698604 (accessed on 24 May 2010).

Earth community have reached to a critical point, different churches and church documents from the globe have reacted and expressed their concern to curb and contain the alarming consequences of the crisis.

The Stewardship Imperative

The responsibility of the Church towards creation is insistently being highlighted in many of the church writings and documents. The 2004 Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church dedicated Chapter 10 to “Safeguarding the Environment.” Emerging from this reflection is the conclusion that “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one.”⁵ In the 1990 World Day of Peace message, ‘Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation,’ John Paul II states that “the proper ecological balance will not be found without directly addressing the structural forms of poverty that exist throughout the world.” (11).⁶ In a 2003 ecology statement, the Canadian Bishops amplify this papal concern by stating that “ecological harmony cannot exist in a world of unjust social structures; nor can the extreme social inequalities of our current world order result in ecological sustainability [17].”⁷ In other words, economy and ecology (and culture) must be addressed in a seamless, holistic fashion in a manner that is ultimately rooted in the incarnate and glorious Jesus Christ. Benedict XVI had also recalled several times that this task entrusted to us by God the Creator requires us to grasp the rhythm and logic of creation.

The created world, structured in an intelligent way by God, is entrusted to our responsibility and though we are able to analyse it and transform it we cannot consider ourselves creation’s absolute master. We are called, rather, to exercise responsible

⁵ *Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology Fact Sheet*, Compiled by John McCarthy S. J., ref., http://www.ecojesuit.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/CST_ENG (accessed on 10 June, 2013).

⁶ Pope John Paul II’s 1990 Message for the World Day of Peace, ‘Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation’ was the first comprehensive Papal document dedicated solely to ecology and has been widely influential. The full text of the Pope’s Message is available: <http://conservation.catholic.org/ecologicalcrisis.htm>.

⁷ The Canadian Conference of the Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), “Life on earth today is plagued with an unprecedented and accelerating ecological crisis” (Pastoral Letter on Ecology), 03 October 2003.

stewardship of creation, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits, and to cultivate it, finding the resources necessary for everyone to live with dignity. Through the help of nature itself and through hard work and creativity, humanity is indeed capable of carrying out its grave duty to hand on the earth to future generations so that they too, in turn, will be able to inhabit it worthily and continue to cultivate it.⁸

The choice to be a good steward of creation will be one of the characteristics of Christians who know that theirs is not the final generation. Generation after generation will have to struggle to build the Kingdom of Christ until God establishes the final Kingdom. Until then, the good deeds of every faithful follower of Christ contribute to the advancement of Christ's kingdom. Among the "righteous deeds" that compose the "fine linen of the saints" (cf. Revelation 19:8) at the end of time will certainly be the good stewardship of this earth, the fruit of God's creative love.

Although the church was highly criticised for its Western "arrogance towards nature" and "limitless rule of creation," the ecological indictment of Christianity boils down to somewhat contradictory assertions: that the postulated transcendence and dominion of humanity over nature encourages thoughtless exploitation of the earth and that the otherworldly orientation of Christianity encourages contempt and disregard for the earth.⁹ As Patrick Dobel points out,

Christianity separates both humanity and God from the earth and destroys the inherent sacredness of the earth. This alienation is coupled with humanity's innate superiority over nature and

⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, August 26, 2009.

⁹ In documenting the first indictment, authors often cite Genesis 1:26: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." Some also quote Genesis 1:29: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." One of the main proponents of this theory was Lynn White Jr. For his complete arguments and views, cf. Lynn White, Jr., "Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155, (March 10, 1967), pp. 1203-1207.

the divine mandate to exploit nature limitlessly for human ends – a mandate that is carried out in the context of antagonism and an expectation that the earth must be treated harshly to gain the yield of human survival. Together these notions have shaped Western culture's exploitation of the earth.¹⁰

The critics see modern science and technology along with notions of unbridled progress and exploitation emerging from this Judeo-Christian matrix. They conclude that Christianity must accept most of the "blame" for the unique "Western" perspectives which have led to the present state of affairs.¹¹ Given, the unsoundness of the theory that blames Christianity for the environmental crisis, especially for separating both humanity and God from the earth and destroys the inherent sacredness of the earth, it is surprising that it has gained such remarkable currency.

The Church, on the contrary, has reiterated and quite often exhorted the faithful to follow a life-style that is based on the biblical and catechetical concept of stewardship, which is fundamentally based on "responsible stewardship" (cf. Gen 1:28) and not based on domination.¹² As stewards, human beings recognize that the environment does not belong to them but is a gift entrusted to them which demands responsibility in action. Human beings have to discern the role granted to them by God by exercising their intelligence and ethical judgment. The mind of the Church in this regard is explicitly exposed in the following words, "They have to legitimately exercise a *responsible stewardship over nature*, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits and to cultivate it in new ways, with the assistance of advanced technologies, so that it can worthily accommodate and feed the world's population."¹³ Because environmental stewards act in the service of human interests and value for nature

¹⁰ J. Patrick Dobel, "Stewards of the Earth's Resources: A Christian Response to Ecology", *Christian Century* (October 12, 1977): p.906.

¹¹ For a feeling of such criticism and blame, see *Covenant and Creation* by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* edited by Charles Birch, William Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 26-36.

¹² Cf. Gene M. Grossman and Alan B. Krueger, "Economic Growth and the Environment," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 110 (May 1995): pp. 353-377.

¹³ Benedict XVI, *Caritatis in Veritate* (50), 2009.

generally, individuals taking up the stewardship role must endeavour to show equitable concern for all the values in play, instrumental and non-instrumental, anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric.¹⁴ The moral teaching of the Church, as manifested in the various saintly lives of Christians throughout history, remains a key component in our understanding of how we should live in relationship to the material world. These individuals have challenged us to see that it is prudent for us—as both bodies and spirits—to refrain from consuming more than we need, or to coarsen ourselves by the endless pursuit of luxuries. Moreover, our Christian tradition challenges us to be very careful in our personal lives about the temptations of worldly goods. Yet what is helpful, and even a religious necessity, in one's personal life cannot be translated directly into a social ethic without some caveats.

Reversibility of the Crisis through an Attitudinal Change

“Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it *takes a serious look at its lifestyle*” (Pope John Paul II, World Peace Day Message, 1990). These very words of the Pope expose the intensity of the ecological crisis and the need for an attitudinal change of the humanity who play a major role in accelerating and disseminating the

¹⁴ Usually it is said that anthropocentrists cannot love nature if they do not see it as possessing intrinsic objective moral value (since we love things and persons in virtue of a wide range of properties, moral and non-moral), I agree with this view that for anthropocentrists and non-anthropocentrists, ‘love of nature’ may take very different forms.

But my point here is that when enacting the role of environmental steward, stewards must try to be neutral between both points of view, whatever their own feelings. Few if any non-anthropocentrists need to be persuaded that human welfare or autonomy have a moral significance they should not disregard. Strong anthropocentrists, however, may need to be given reasons why they should not discount the moral values non-anthropocentrists assign nature in its own right. The pragmatic strategy being adopted here is point out that as these too are human values that matter to present or future people, they have a moral significance that even strong anthropocentrists ought not disregard *when enacting the role of environmental steward*. For more discourse on this arguments, see Jennifer Welchman, “A Defense of Environmental Stewardship” in http://www.academia.edu/335593/A_Defense_of_Environmental_Stewardship (accessed on 10 March 2006).

disastrous effects of the crisis. The Pope in the message emphatically asserts that the seriousness of the ecological issue lays bare the depth of humanity's moral crisis. Because of the place of human beings in nature, care for the environment is never only an economic or technological issue; it is above all a moral one. Any solution that attempts to solve environmental problems based only on utilitarian factors will not provide authentic solutions. For both economic activity and the use of technology are human actions and therefore always contain a moral component. As Renthly Keitzar says, "The destruction of our environment is due to a neglect of ecology caused by short-term economic interests and the selfish quest for pleasure or profit, and is therefore ultimately caused by a lack of Gospel values."¹⁵ Our Lord asks us to learn from the birds of the air, the lilies of the field. Values that are essential for the survival of life are those of caring and sharing, not domination and manipulation. Values are expressed in life-styles, practices and structures. While we cannot agree upon a uniform life-style, a conscious and judicious rejection of extravagant and wasteful use of natural resources is a possibility and should be a priority for all. K.C. Abraham, further encapsulating and summarizing this gospel life-style, reminds, "...we need to put a limit to our needs, slavish acceptance of everything the consumerist economy produces and the market dictates is contrary to ecologically responsible living."¹⁶ In fact, the above observation points towards the systematic and senseless pattern of domination and exploitation that the humans follow to silence nature and to the ecological death of both nature and humans.

The Church has repeatedly voiced against this *death culture* and warned against this moral imperative in strong language that the destruction of our environment is due to a neglect of ecology caused by short-term economic interests and the selfish quest for pleasure or profit, and is therefore ultimately caused by a lack of Gospel values. Assessing the total adverse effect of human doing to nature, the Philippine Bishops have stated,

¹⁵ Renthly Keitzar, "Creation and Restoration: Three Biblical Reflections" in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, David G. Hallman (ed.), (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 59.

¹⁶ K. C. Abraham, "A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis" in *Ecotheology*, 76.

We often use the world progress to describe what has taken place over the past few decades. There is no denying in some areas we have improved... But can we say that there is real progress? The poor are as disadvantaged as ever and the natural world has been grievously wounded. We have stripped it bare, silenced its sounds and banished other creatures, from the community of the living. Through our thoughtlessness and greed we have sinned against God and His Creation. One thing is certain: we cannot continue to ignore and disregard the Earth. Already we are experiencing the consequence of our short-sightedness and folly. Even though we squeeze our lands and try to extract more from them, they produce less food. The air in our cities is heavy with noxious fumes. Instead of bringing energy and life it causes bronchial illness. Our forests are almost gone, our rivers are almost empty, our springs and wells no longer sparkle with the living water... Because the living world is interconnected...¹⁷

The voice of the Philippine Bishops does not stand alone in this perspective. From many quarters of the world, such and similar voices have been heard to have a radical change in the attitude of humans with regard to preserve the integrity of nature. When it went on to consider how ecological problems can be overcome, Pope John Paul II too, insistently pointed out that the ecological problem cannot be solved unless modern society '*takes a serious look at its life style.*' He reiterated that: 'simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life'.¹⁸

Thus all these reactions from the different corners of the Church against the human doings against nature equally voice for a necessitating change in the *modus operandi* of human behavior: from a destructive behavior to respectful, considerate and reverential. Most of today's ecological crises have originated out of the lack of human respect towards the integrity of nature. Nature is considered as a *thing* to be used and abused, exploited and fragmented, conquered and privatized, plundered

¹⁷The CBCP, "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?", no. 10

¹⁸ John Paul II, 'Message for the World Day of Peace', (1990), no. 13.

and wasted for the selfish and petty use and interests of individuals, corporate organizations, and land mafias. Pope Benedict XVI was deeply committed to raising awareness about the urgency of finding solutions to ecological problems and to promoting an ecologically respectful lifestyle. But, perhaps even more strongly than John Paul II, he contrasted 'the human environment' with the natural environment. He insisted that there is an inseparable link between the two but held that the former is 'more serious' and should be given priority.

In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), Pope Benedict maintained that the environment is 'God's gift to everyone' and that we must respect the 'inbuilt order' or 'grammar' which God has given to nature, rather than treating it as raw material which we can use in any way we wish. He even went on to point out the need for 'an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of *new life-styles*'. [13]

Integrity of Nature

One of the important concerns of the churches with regard to curb the consequences of the ecological crisis at this regard is to safeguard and preserve the integrity of nature. The integrity of creation not only points to nature's dynamism and internally bounded order but it also refers to earth's treasures as a *one-time endowment*. The planet is self-renewing in ways seen and unseen. This totality is immensely rich, varied, and dynamic. It is also finite, limited, vulnerable, and subject to subversion and exhaustion. As we have noted, nature is by nature a creative borrower. Jeremy Rifkin's generalization at this juncture is worth to be noted:

The most important truth about us, our artifacts, and our civilization is that it is all borrowed. Even the molecules in our face and body are there only temporarily, on their journey to and from the environment. We are forever borrowing from the environment. We transform resources from nature into utilities in order to create and maintain our way of life. Yet everything we transform must eventually end up "back" in nature "after we have expropriated whatever temporary value we can". *All* our activity

is an economics of borrowing. We are indebted “to the core of our being.”¹⁹

In short, the integrity of creation according to Rifkin refers to a one-time endowment that can be and is being jeopardized. Consider William Penn (1644-1718) in *Fruits of Solitude*: “[W]e have nothing that we can call our own; no, not our selves: For we are all but Tenants, and at Will, too, of the great Lord of our selves, and the rest of this great Farm, the World that we live upon.”²⁰ The conclusion of many religious communities about the integrity of nature is that the earth is a commonwealth – the world a great farm in which we are all but tenants, an *oikos* [home], we are to till and tend but not own.²¹ Yes, the earth is exterior to human existence.

In the 2003 ecology statement, the Canadian Conference of the Catholic Bishops (CCCC) emphatically communicated to the church people to be conscious of this integral nature of the earth, stating that “ecological harmony cannot exist in a world of unjust social structures; nor can the extreme social inequalities of our current world order result in ecological sustainability [13].” In other words, economy and ecology (and culture) must be addressed in a seamless, holistic fashion in a manner that is ultimately rooted in the incarnate and glorious Jesus Christ [17]. The

¹⁹ Jeremy Rifkin, *Declaration of a Heretic* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 97.

²⁰ William Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude*, ed. Charles W. Eliot, Harvard Classics 1 (New York: Collier, 1937) [1909], no page given; cited from J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 67.

²¹ In this view, absolutist notions of private property and justification of sharp inequity on the basis of property rights are usually rejected. The Diggers, a movement contemporary with Penn’s Quakers, included in their 1649 manifesto: “And the Earth, which was made to be a Common Storehouse for all, is bought and sold and kept within the hands of a few, whereby the Great Creator is mightily dishonoured, as if He were a respecter of persons, delighting in the comfortable livelihood of some, and rejoicing in the miserable poverty and straits of others.” Cited from Lewis H. Beren’s *The Digger Movement in the Days of the Commonwealth* (London: Holland Press, 1961) [1906], 96. Not that such religion belongs to the past. The papal encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (1981) of Pope John Paul II says, on moral grounds, that “the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone.” *Laborem Exercens*, no. 6.

CCCB is seeking to make a theological point here that the earth and the things it holds are not to be taken for granted, nor treated as dead, nor merely "used" as if they had no identity and truth of their own. They have, therefore they deserve to be recognized, acknowledged, and respected. We *are* earth, bits of it which have come to develop a mysterious interiority, the capacity for reflective thought and for freedom and love. As Samuel Rayan says, "the earth is our body itself, our common body inseparably and forever. This body, all human persons have in common with all living things and with the entire cosmos."²² Therefore the integrity of the earth means that the earth deserves to be treated with reverence and tenderness. It has to be bequeathed healthy and whole and beautiful to generations to come, to be source and support of life to them, to be for them too the sacrament of God and foundational grace as it is to us. Yes, when we feel the suffering of others, and despair over the prospects of life itself, we realize how deeply intertwined our spirits are with the earth's. It is this consciousness and sensitivity that the Church is clamouring for by preserving the integrity of the nature; a thing to be considered as the trademark of Christian ecological sensitivity.

In short, Church's commitment to re-create and re-paraphrase this oppressed land a green earth is uncompromising. The Church is commissioned by the Risen Lord to disseminate the 'Life' that he has brought forth from the Father to the whole world, so that everything on this earth may fully whole and fully alive.

Some Suggestions

Taken into account of all that are being exposed above as the sentiments of the Church to carve out a people of ecologically conscious, the following points can be considered as some vital recommendations to be followed in the daily life of the church followers.

- i. God has covenanted with the earth to herself/him. The earth and every part of this earth are sacred and connected. So it is recommended that Christians to start appreciate the web of life and learn to dwell on this earth.

²² Samuel Rayan, "The Earth Is the Lord's," in *Ecotheology*, 136.

- ii. As Indians, we are steeped in a sense of the sacred, a sense of wonder and awe, openness and surrender before the mystery of creation. The reverence for nature and the interdependence of the secular and the sacred are familiar to us. So it is highly recommended to make enough time for silence and wonder towards mystery of the Earth.
- iii. We resonate with our people in celebrating life at significant moments in the seasonal cycles. So it is desirable to develop a taste for the bio-diversity of this beautiful earth and pray with the changing moods of the birds, the trees, the mountains.
- iv. The Lord dwells in the heart of everything that is. Let us therefore enjoy everything with detachment. We strive to develop a spirituality of 'enjoyment with detachment.'
- v. With our Church Mothers and Fathers (esp. Hildegard of Bingen, St. Francis Assisi, St. Benedict, St. Ireneus, etc.), the Church believes that the creation is the outpouring of God's body. As a sacrament of God, let us learn to accept and revere the creation.
- vi. The beautiful sacrament of God is entrusted to us humans, to tend and to take care (Gen 2:15) because the earth belongs to the Lord (Lev 25:23). It is fragile and vulnerable in our hands. Hence let us learn to continually receive this gift and sustain its beauty and vulnerability in respecting the bio-diversity.
- vii. Each one of us is a part of a long journey of life and we carry within us a history of billions of years. More than ever, we need to be awakened to the interrelatedness of life. We cousins to one another genetically and spiritually; we are part of cosmic act of growing into a culture of inter-relatedness. We are also part of an ever evolving history enlivened and guided by the spirit of God who renews the face of the Earth every moment.
- viii. We live our Christian commitment with an ecological understanding, loving actively many rather than one, relishing diverse things rather than stimulating greed, and being faithful to 'creation' rather than to our egos.
- ix. As Christian community, we want to be rooted in indigenous systems of our people, creatively and courageously pursuing alternate models of sustainable living and relevant interventions that respect the earth.

- x. We have to resolve to labour with God to save our beleaguered planet, our beautiful vulnerable Mother Earth. Together with the divine Spirit, let us replenish and renew the face of the earth in striving to realize a new heaven and new earth.
- xi. We pray with Teilhard de Chardin: "Blessed be you, universal matter, immeasurable time, boundless ether, triple abyss of stars, atoms and generations; you who by overflowing and dissolving our narrow standards of measurements reveal to us the dimensions of God" (*Hymn to Matter*).

Finally, the Church as a community is also called to work for the environmental issues. Let the Church authorities and Leadership initiatives address this eco-spiritual awareness issues among the faithful by developing pastoral and environmental care units in different parishes and church units. There is also a great need for evolving an Indian theology of creation which will be sensitive to our unique living world, our diverse cultures and our religious heritage. Our different liturgies must celebrate the beauty and pain of our earth, our connectedness to the natural world and the on-going struggle for social justice. The Church authorities must see to it that the administrations of our Christian schools and other educational institutions to give special importance to the theme of peace, justice and the integrity of creation in their schools and institutions. It is also highly suggestible that to set up of a Care for the Earth ministry at every level of church organization, from the basic Christian communities through the parish structure and diocesan offices right up to the national level. This service ministry could help formulate and implement ecological policies and strategies which flow from our new and wider religious vision. Let the ecological sensitivity and sensibility of the members of the Church enable to integrate the Earth-Day (April 22), and the Environment Day (June 5) into the Church calendar and thus encourage the people to pray and be aware of the ecological needs of today!

St Charles Lwanga Theological Institute
Windhoek, Namibia
inchodyoliver@gmail.com

